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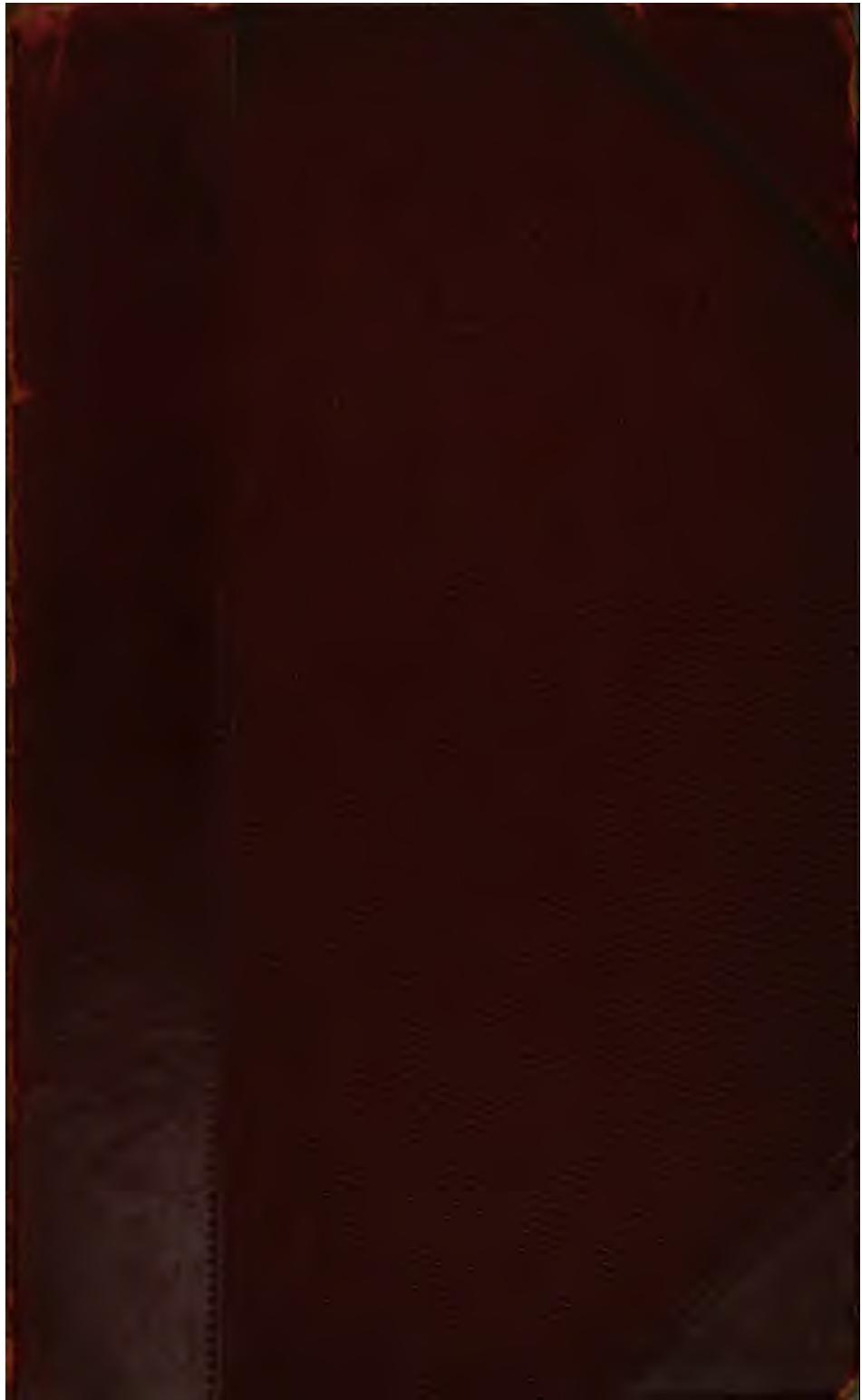
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From the Author  
to his much esteemed Friend.

Mr. Dore.

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LETTERS  
TO  
A FRIEND,  
ON THE  
EVIDENCES, DOCTRINES, AND DUTIES  
OF THE  
Christian Religion.

---

BY OLINTHUS GREGORY, LL.D.  
OF THE ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY, WOOLWICH.

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VOL. I.

---

Brove all things; hold fast that which is good. PAUL.  
Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you... For, we have not followed cunningly devised fables. PERRIN.

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1812.



C. Baldwin, Printer,  
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to

LIEUTENANT COLONEL

WILLIAM MUDGE,

OF THE ROYAL ARTILLERY,

FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY,

*Lieutenant Governor of the Royal Military Academy,*

&c. &c. &c.

SIR,

I BEG leave to lay the following "Letters," written originally for the private use of a Friend, before the Public under your auspices: and shall be extremely happy if you shall find them to be, what it has been my sole wish that they *should* be, strictly conformable to "the Word of God." I should not have presumed to solicit your protection of this work, were I not aware that while you are zealously, and most beneficially to the Public, discharging the duties which devolve upon you in directing the important studies of our Institution, and while you are pursuing with assiduity and success those philosophical inves-

tigations to which you are impelled by the natural bent of your mind; you do not *confine* your attention to those objects, momentous as they are: but have learnt, and are anxious to convince others, that Religion, defended from the chilling indifference produced by Latitudinarian principles on the one hand, and from the wild intemperance engendered by Antinomian delusions on the other, has the most powerful tendency to elevate the character of individuals, to secure the happiness of society, and to maintain the stability of states. That you may find the sentiments explained and enforced in the following sheets, equally distant from the dangerous extremes to which I have just adverted, is the earnest hope and desire of,

Sir,

Your much obliged

and most obedient Servant,

OLINTHUS GREGORY.

## PREFACE.

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THE history of the work now presented to the public may be given in very few words. It originated in a series of conversations which I had about five years ago with a friend much younger than myself, who had a considerable acquaintance with almost all except religious subjects. *He* expressed much surprize that a person of my habits and pursuits in other respects should adopt the religious notions I had long entertained, or indeed be solicitous about any religious opinions whatever ; and *I* endeavoured to assign the reasons which led me to embrace them, and to consider such topics as of the first importance. After a short time we were so far separated as to have much fewer opportunities of personal intercourse ; and I in consequence became induced to carry on the momentous inquiry we had previously commenced, by letter. Pursuant to this intention, all the letters in the first volume were actually written : they were read in manuscript by my friend ; and, as I have

reason to believe, were not unproductive of benefit. Having proceeded thus far, a growing particularity of inquiry was produced on the one side, and a gradual extension of plan on the other; and thus, after many interruptions, and in the midst of numerous avocations of a very different kind, the work has become what it now is.

I had not however proceeded half way in the execution of my plan before it occurred to me, that what I first intended for private use, might be beneficial to others <sup>in</sup> circumstances analogous to those of my friend; and I recollect that whatever I might publish on the subject of religion would at least have the advantage of appearing disinterested, as it proceeded from the pen of a *layman*. It is, I am aware, extremely ridiculous for those who adopt the prescriptions of their physicians, and act upon the advice of their lawyers, *although* they are professional, to object to defences of christianity from the pens of Clergymen *because* they are professional: yet, absurd and uncandid as the objection is, it is often advanced: it is therefore proper to meet it; and at times to show that there are those who cannot on such occasions be

actuated by any love of worldly applause, or any thirst after emolument, but who feel sufficiently interested about Religion, and are sufficiently convinced of its powerful tendency to improve the conduct of individuals and to augment the general stock of happiness, to step for a little while out of their more appropriate province, to plead its cause. Such defenders of revealed religion there have been in all ages; yet they have not been so numerous as to render it improper or indecorous to increase their number: especially as the old prejudice still continues to operate with unabated energy; and there are many persons from whom the claims of Christianity receive a more respectful attention, when they are urged by one who is neither "a clergymen" nor "a methodist."

There have long existed several valuable essays on the *Evidences of Christianity*; and we now possess in the English Language especially, the treatise of Dr. Paley, which I have always understood (though I am ashamed to say I have never read it) is an honour to our age and nation. Had a luminous statement of

the Historical Evidences been all that was aimed at or required, I should at once have referred my friend to Dr. Paley's as a standard, and, I believe, unanswerable work; and never have troubled either him or the public with any remarks of mine on the subject of religion. But it is very possible, and indeed very common, for men to be Christians in name and theory, and infidels in practice ; to profess a belief in Christ, and in heart to deny him ; to acknowledge him as Messiah, and to refuse to obey him as king ; to avow the warmest admiration of the New Testament, and to despise and ridicule every thing in it which is characteristic and peculiar, and which constitutes it a summary of that " truth " which alone " can make " us free " from the dominion of sin and from the punishment due to it. This I consider as the most striking and lamentable error of the present times ; and it is, therefore, the more remarkable that such an error should not have been frequently and pointedly exposed. To adopt the language of an admirable living writer.—" While the outworks of the sanctuary " have been defended with the utmost ability, its interior " has been too much neglected, and the fire upon the

“ altar suffered to languish and decay. The truths and  
“ mysteries which distinguish the Christian from all  
“ other religions, have been little attended to by some,  
“ totally denied by others ; and while infinite efforts  
“ have been made, by the utmost subtlety of argumen-  
“ tation, to establish the truth and authenticity of  
“ revelation, few have been exerted, in comparison,  
“ to show what it really contains.”

Now the deficiency here adverted to, is that which I have endeavoured to supply. I have attempted to exhibit in small compass a view not merely of the Evidences, but of the distinguishing doctrines, and principal binding duties of the Christian Religion. I have endeavoured to show that Christianity is not so contemptible and bungling a fraud as some infidels have represented it to be ; and to point out at the same time many palpable and enormous absurdities into which Infidelity precipitates its votaries. But this I reckon the least important part of my undertaking, though I humbly hope it may have its uses. The facts of Christianity are only so far momentous as the doctrines are momentous which are suspended upon them. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ would be

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no more to us (I mention it with reverence) than the death of Socrates, were it not that he suffered as *a sacrifice for sin*; and his resurrection of no more importance to us than the emancipation of a butterfly from its chrysalis, were it not for the assurance that “*even as he has risen so shall all his faithful followers*. I have, therefore, entered pretty much at large into the establishment and defence of the leading doctrines which distinguish Christianity from all other religious systems. In the choice of these I have kept almost entirely out of sight the higher points which separate the Arminians from the Calvinists; while I have attempted to illustrate and confirm, as essential, those grand doctrines in which both Arminians and Calvinists, and indeed the great majority of Christians, differ from the Socinians.

In accomplishing these objects I have not aimed at elaborate composition, or the elegancies of style; believing that if my professional employments did not tend greatly to render success in such an attempt improbable, my real inability to dazzle by splendid imagery and profuse embellishment, would. I have endeavoured to reason clearly and *fairly* ; have

availed myself of every argument I have met with in other authors that was applicable to my purpose; have endeavoured to compress them into small space; and have, farther, had occasional recourse to some arguments, which it is probable would not readily present themselves to any one who was not moderately conversant with scientific topics : these, it may be added, were frequently suggested by the consideration that the gentleman for whose use the letters were originally written, had successfully engaged in scientific pursuits.

I know not whether it may be necessary to apologize for the frequency and extent of my quotations from Scripture, especially in the second volume. Let it be recollected that the object of that volume is to teach the *doctrines* of Scripture; that is, to show what they are, to exhibit them faithfully : and to effect this without being allowed to cite the language of Scripture, would be, as Mr. Boyle long ago remarked,  
“ to challenge a man to a duel, and oblige him not  
“ to make use of his best weapons; or to compel him  
“ to prove the torrid zone habitable, and not make use  
“ of the testimony of navigators.” Besides, the maxim

of Chillingworth, though old, has not as yet been proved absurd; namely, “that we cannot speak of “the *things* of God, better than in the *words* of God.”

I would fain hope that my numerous quotations from other authors, will not be ascribed to a desire to make a parade of extensive reading. My acquaintance with the works of other writers, and especially on the subject of religion, is, in truth, far less than it ought to be; and my sole object in such frequent references and extracts has been, to confirm and fortify my own sentiments by the authority of many whom the world in general consider as learned, wise, and, therefore, highly worthy of regard.

Lastly, I beg to remark that I hope and trust the freedom of my occasional animadversions upon theologians from whom I differ on the several topics discussed in these letters, has in no instance arisen from contempt of them, or their opinions, from uncandid interpretations of their language, or from unworthy personal feelings. My business has been to attempt to refute sentiments which I deem erroneous and dangerous, as well as to establish those which to me appear true and beneficial. It is possible, I am

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persuaded, to feel the strongest conviction of the errors certain men may hold, without cherishing a particle of ill-will against those who hold them. And surely it is perfectly fair and perfectly candid, when theologians of a certain class endeavour to divest Christianity of every thing which is peculiar to it, pride themselves upon the skill and dexterity with which they effect this, and triumph over what they denominate the irrational and contracted tenets of others; to turn the tables upon them, and show that *their* system is clogged with its full load of absurdities and contradictions,—that their mode of translation, if adopted universally, would rob the New Testament of its whole spirit, energy, and perspicuity,—and that by stripping the Christian system of its peculiarities, they deprive it nearly of all which renders it of consequence whether a man be a believer or an unbeliever. Under the influence of these sentiments, I shall conclude by adopting the language of Dr. Jortin on another occasion : the following disquisitions “ are designed, “ slight and imperfect as they are, for the service of “ TRUTH, by one who would be glad to attend, and “ grace her triumphs : *As her soldier*, if he has had

“ the honour to serve successfully under her banner :  
“ or, as her captive, tied to her chariot wheels, if he  
“ has, though undesignedly, committed any offence  
“ against her.”

**OLINTHUS GREGORY.**

*Royal Military Academy, Woolwich,*  
*October 1, 1811.*

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## ERRATA IN VOL. I.

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Page 16 line 8, *for best men read best scholars.*  
39        6, *for ΝΗΓΤΡΕΟΝ read ΝΗΓΡΕΤΟΝ.*  
65        17, *for infinity read affinity.*  
53        8, *for divina read divino.*  
95 note x, add Psalm lxxviii.  
175 line 4 of note, *for whose work read which.*  
301 line 9, *for gave it read gave those laws.*  
307 line 6 from the bottom, *for often in distress, and always  
in want: read subject to distress and disapp-  
ointment.*

*Corrected.*

4117  
122 Red  
J. J.

LETTERS  
ON THE  
EVIDENCES, DOCTRINES, AND DUTIES  
OF THE  
**CHRISTIAN RELIGION.**

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LETTER I.

*On the Folly and Absurdity of Deism.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I WAS much gratified, on the arrival of your letter from ———, to find that you had not forgotten me; and more gratified still to learn that the important topic, on which we so often conversed when we were together, has as frequently occupied your thoughts since our separation. While human existence is as much characterised by the uncertainty as by the shortness of its duration, and there is interposed between us and Heaven, or Hell, or annihilation, nothing but *life*, the most brittle and

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B

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precarious thing imaginable;—while there is no cause for vanity in being involved in impenetrable darkness, and none for consolation when we are in despair of ever finding a comforter;—so long will it be the first and principal concern of a wise man, to inquire into his nature, his duties, and his expectations;—to ascertain where he ought to doubt, where to be confident, and where to submit: and these inquiries necessarily comprise the subject of Religion. “*Who is wise, and he shall understand these things; prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors shall fall therein.*” (Hos. xiv.)

The derision with which some of your deistical companions affect to treat you is matter of regret, but not of surprise. If their Deism be the result of supposed conviction, they are objects of pity; if, which is more likely to be the case, it be a consequence of indifference, and this deplorable indifference furnish them with a ground for boasting, *they*, instead of *yourself*, would be fit subjects for ridicule, were it proper to indulge such a propensity on so serious an occasion.

To a person of your extensive observation and contemplative turn of mind, it must appear extremely obvious, that as the vicious lives of many men make it their *interest* that religion in general

should be a bug-bear, and the Christian Religion especially an artful system of delusion; so they will too commonly be found not only ready but eager to believe them ready such. Nor can it be expected that they should stop here. For when once a certain method of treating a subject is nicely adapted to people's humours and situations, it would be strange indeed if they did not indulge in it; particularly when they find, as they soon will, that the majority of almost every company will cordially concur with them. If you wish to be proof against sneers and laughter, when founded on so momentous a subject, consider that the mirth and pleasure of the unthinking part of mankind (by far the greater part) is almost as blind and mechanical as the actions of an automaton. Let them be but struck, and they will move as mere inert matter moves, until the effect of the impulse ceases. They are stirred, and often delighted; though with what, or for what cause, or to what purpose, they know not. Except perhaps when the string of Religion is roughly touched by the hand of an enemy: for then, many ignorant, and all irreligious, hearts, like chords in unison, dance to the motion, and yield the same sound: just as the clank of a madman's chain, while it thrills to the soul of a man in his senses, shall collect around him all the lunatics in the same ward of his prison; and cause them to dance with

maniac delight, when every spectator shudders with horror.

I have heard of some modern free-thinkers, whose comprehension of mind has placed them on such an eminence, that they look down with contempt not only upon Christians, but upon the shrivelled minds of other unbelievers, who have not yet taken such an adventurous flight; some, who not merely deride those whom half the world calls fanatics and visionaries, but who are seated in a "scorner's chair" of such peculiar qualities as enchant them till they sneer at the narrow prejudices of Hume, and Gibbon, and Voltaire, and Paine, whom they fancy they have discovered to be "as superstitious as washewomen." Others have been impelled to still greater heights in this intellectual delirium. *They* contemplate with delight the prospect of a world without a Creator or a Governor: and boast of their *demonstrations*, by which they can convert any *sensible* man into an Atheist in a quarter of an hour; a transformation which of course would not be very difficult after they had explained to that sensible man, upon their own hypothesis, from whom he derived his sense. But the gentlemen, into whose company you are now so frequently thrown, do not, I presume, belong to either of these classes. It is more probable that some of them have embraced a kind of SEMI-ATHEISM (I cannot think of a more

appropriate term); a fine-spun theory, in conformity with which they persuade themselves that the Supreme Being does not govern the universe he created; but, after having covered it with living, and many of them *rational*, beings, leaves them to console themselves with the cheering reflection that they are inhabitants of a forsaken and fatherless world,—while HE, according to this *comfortable* as well as *philosophical* notion, like a kind of Sardanapalus, sits at ease and surveys the goodly scene. If men who endeavour to disseminate such opinions ever cease to ridicule the maintainers of opposite sentiments, and condescend to argumentation, you might ask them to explain how it is possible that a derived being can be independent? You might inquire of them whether that which is derived from another can exist *necessarily* in the first moment of its being? Whether that which does not exist necessarily in the first moment of its existence, can exist necessarily in the second, or in any succeeding instant? Or, whether it must not owe its continued existence to the Being by whom it was at first produced? If they be men of any acumen, they will at once perceive that, by supposing the existence of the being to continue when that on which it depended ceases, they would suppose it to be without the cause of its existence; and thus they would, by a kind of mental *felo-de-se*, support their hypothesis by destroying the super-

structure on which it rests: so that if they, with this acuteness which I have supposed them to possess, unite only common candour and openness to conviction, you would by a very short process make them ashamed of this fashionable Semi-atheism, and compel them to acknowledge that all the creatures of God do incessantly depend upon Him for the continuance of their existence. Thus will your opponents be forced to take the ground of pure Deism; and on that ground it is that you must meet them, if you have any wish to enter upon this momentous contest.

The opinions of Deists, from the time of Lord Herbert (the first and purest of the British free-thinkers) to the present period, have assumed such multifarious shapes, that it is difficult to state them in such a way as to be free from objection. Nominal Deism is separated into nearly as many climates and districts as nominal Christianity: so that, if Calvinism be placed in the torrid zone, and Socinianism in the polar regions of Christianity; you may with equal propriety imagine the sentiments of Herbert to occupy the equatoreal regions, and those of Hume, Holcroft, and Godwin, the frigid zone of infidelity. Moderate Deists however, and to such a candid reasoner would direct his arguments, profess to believe in one God, possessing natural and moral attributes, the former of which may be comprehended

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under power and knowledge, the latter under justice and benevolence: they believe that virtue is that which is consistent with the will of God; and yet, that God has never made any revelation of his will to men; but that the collection of books which we receive *as such*, and consequently by way of distinction denominate THE SCRIPTURES, are in fact no such thing, but are the oldest, the most artful, and most successful collection of forgeries that ever was palmed upon the world.

And are they the apostles and disseminators of this heart-chilling system who wish to laugh you out of your religion? or rather, who are ridiculing you for the scrupulous attention with which you are investigating the evidences of Christianity, and for the solicitude you express that you may "be established "in Faith and Holiness?" Let them enjoy the comforts of their supposed intellectual superiority, while you pursue your inquiry; and then you will in due time "enjoy the fruits of the spirit," while they may haply retain all that fine flow of soul which so naturally results from the consciousness of being lost in a labyrinth of uncertainty. Do not suppose that the exultation so commonly manifested by these men, and which seems so much to have impressed your mind, is always natural. Confident as they often profess themselves to be, that unless you are a mere child in intellect you will soon

think as they do ; be assured, that in general their sarcasms and affected contempt originate in the apprehension that your sentiments will soon be diametrically opposite to theirs, and in their consequent eagerness to deter you from inquiry. Do not imagine that when these your lively, and laughing, and witty companions leave you, their mirth and hilarity support them equally in solitude. Could you follow them into their retirements *without being witnessed*, or could you conceive the language of their souls to be formed into audible words, you might, without any breach of candour, fancy them soliloquizing in the following language of Pascal.

" I hardly know who has sent me into the world. Nor know I what the world is, or what I am myself. I am shockingly ignorant of all things. I know not what my body is, what my senses are, or what my soul is. This very part of me which thinks what I speak, which reflects upon itself and upon every thing around me, is yet as ignorant of itself as it is of every thing else. I behold these frightful spaces of the universe with which I am encompassed, and feel myself confined to one little portion of the vast extent, without understanding why I am placed in this part of it rather than in any other ; or why the short period of time that was allotted me to live was assigned to me at this particular point, rather than at any other, of the whole eternity which was before

me, or of that which is to come after me. I see nothing but infinities on all sides, which swallow me up like an atom, or transform me to a shadow which endures but a single instant, and is never to return. All that I know is, that I must shortly die ; but this very death, from which I cannot escape, is the thing of which I am most ignorant.

“ As I know not whence I came, so I know not whither I am going : only this I know, that, at my departure out of the world, I must either be for ever annihilated, or fall into the hands of an incensed God, without being able to decide which of these two conditions will be my everlasting portion.

“ Such is my state ; so full of weakness, darkness, and wretchedness. And from all this I conclude, that I ought to pass all the days of my life without ever considering what is hereafter to befall me ; and that I have nothing to do but to follow my inclinations without reflection or disquiet, doing all that which, if what is said of a miserable eternity be true, will infallibly plunge me into it. It is *possible* I might find some light to dispel my doubts ; but I will not take the trouble to stir one foot in search of it ; rather, despising all those who *do* take pains in this inquiry, I am resolved to go on, without fear or foresight, and brave the grand event : I will pass as easily as I can out of life, and die utterly uncertain about the eternal state of my future existence.”

If this be a fair representation of the strange process of thought often pursued by the generality of modern Deists, as I apprehend it is, you will agree with me, that it is an honour to religion to have such unreasonable men for its professed enemies, and to Christians that such, and such *principally*, are their revilers.

Yet, as idolizers of reason, we cannot suppose that these gentlemen reject the Christian religion, and adopt the notions of Deism, without thinking they have found sufficient reasons for the preference. Let us, my friend, by instituting a short comparison, see if we can discover them. Can a Deist arrive at his convictions by any thing like the following gradation?

Christianity contains a professed revelation of the will of God : Deism leaves me in perfect darkness as to his will : therefore I prefer Deism. Christianity exhibits palpable, obvious, and simple criteria of the nature of virtue and vice : Deism envelopes the nature of virtue and vice in the greatest doubt and perplexity : therefore I prefer Deism. Christianity furnishes the strongest possible motives for virtuous conduct, and the most forcible reasons for abstaining from vicious conduct : Deism appeals only to some vague notions relative to the fitness of things, or to moral beauty, or to expediency, which makes a man's own sentiments and feelings, however fluctuating,

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his ultimate guide : therefore I prefer Deism. Christianity often reforms profligate and vicious men : Deism never : therefore I prefer Deism. Christianity often prompts men to schemes of the most extensive philanthropy, and compels them to execute those schemes : Deism scarcely ever devises any such schemes : therefore I prefer Deism. Christianity imparts principles that support men under all the trials and vicissitudes of life : Deism can have recourse to no such principles : therefore I prefer Deism. Christianity assures me of eternal existence beyond the grave ; and that, if it is not to me an eternal portion of felicity, it will be my own fault : Deism leaves me perfectly ignorant, let my conduct here be what it may, whether I shall live beyond the grave or not ; whether such existence, if there be any, will be limited or infinite, happy or miserable : therefore I prefer Deism. Christianity will support me under the languishments of a sick-bed, and in the prospect of death, with the "sure and certain "hope," that death is only a short though dark passage into "an inheritance incorruptible, undestroyed, and which fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven, for God's people :" Deism will then leave me, sinking in an ocean of gloomy apprehension, without one support,—in trembling expectation, that the icy hand of the king of terrors is about to seize me ; but whether to convey me to Heaven, to Hell,

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or to a state of annihilation, I know not : therefore I prefer ——— : no, my friend, it is impossible that any man in his senses can, after tracing this contrast, say, deliberately and sincerely,—*therefore I prefer Deism.*

The reasons, then, which weigh with a Deist must be different from the above. Perhaps you may be told, that the difficulties attending the belief of Christianity are very numerous and great, while the mere reception of the principles of Deism is in a considerable degree free from difficulty, or at least presents no difficulties against which one's mind can strenuously revolt. To ascertain the force of this assertion, let us endeavour to collect into one point of view the chief propositions which must necessarily be included in the creed of a Deist: and I am much mistaking if they will not furnish us with some cogent motives for wishing Christianity *may* be true, independent of all those that result from its own intrinsic beauty, value, and excellency.

Here, again, we will suppose a Deist speaking ; delivering, if I may so call it, "A confession of his "Faith" in his own person. And after you have attended to his declaration, I think you will coincide with me in opinion, that the rejecters of the Gospel are the most resolute believers in the world ; or with Soame Jenyns, that they "must be possessed of much "more faith than is necessary to make them declared

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"Christians, and remain unbelievers from mere credulity." The creed of a Deist, so far as I am able to comprehend his principles, would run thus :

1. I believe that God is a being of matchless holiness, wisdom, power, and benevolence ; that in consequence of his holiness He "cannot look upon ini-quity with satisfaction;" that His wisdom would enable him to contrive, His power to execute, and His benevolence stimulate him to accomplish, the most effectual plans for the establishment of virtue and the suppression of vice ; for the extinction of mental and moral darkness, and the diffusion of mental and moral light : and yet, that God has suffered mankind in every age, and in every country, to remain in the grossest ignorance and darkness for nearly 6000 years ; to struggle with prejudices, to immerse themselves in the blackest and most dismal crimes, to perform the most horrid and murderous rites, and fancy them religious services ;—that He makes the being who possesses the finest faculties to be the greatest enemy to his species,—and thus to plunge himself and others into the deepest miseries : —and all this in consequence of His never affording them the remotest aid,—never supplying them with any invariable principles as preservatives against error, or any specific rules by which they should shape their conduct. That is, I believe this palpable contradiction, that the goodness of God has allowed

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this horribly miserable state of mankind to continue for so many centuries, and has all along prompted him to refuse them any effectual aid or direction.

2. I believe that what is called the Mosaic account of the Creation of the World, and the Fall of Man, is a mere fable; and therefore I believe that God, the wisest and the best of beings, created man with the most noble, refined, and extraordinary faculties of body and mind, faculties infinitely superior to what are possessed by other living creatures; that while *they* eat, and drink, and sleep, unconscious of what shall befall them, *he* may indulge the doubtful anticipation intermingled with frequent *dread* of future occurrences; and that while *they* are supplied with all that is necessary for their sustenance, without either “toiling or spinning,” *man*, the Lord of the creation, is so circumstanced, that, “by the sweat “of his brow,” the labour of his hands, and the anxiety of his mind, he shall earn and “eat bread:” I also believe, that the same infinitely wise and benevolent Being formed woman with delicacy of perception, sweetness of disposition, tenderness of heart, and beauty of frame, far above all we could conceive, did we not witness them, in order that “*her sorrow* “and *her conception* shall be greatly multiplied,” that *she* “shall bring forth children in sorrow,” (while other animals seem scarcely to suffer any thing in bearing and bringing forth their young); and that

she shall be formed exquisitely susceptible of all the emotions of love, in order that "*her desire may be to her husband, and that he may RULE over her.*" That is, I will not believe that these are the effects of just punishment ; but believe that they are marks of *hard treatment* from the wisest and best of Beings towards the most exalted part of his visible creation. I know there is no possible medium between these alternatives ; but I reject the former, because it is reasonable and revealed in the Bible; and adopt the latter, because it is unreasonable and revealed nowhere.

3. I believe that the book called the Bible, was, every word of it, invented and written by men who had no help from God : that what are called *Prophecies* were not such ; that what are called *Miracles* were either tricks of art, or never occurred ; and that though the precepts are often admirable, and the morality pure, it proceeded from impostors, and not from God. The whole book being a collection of delusions and deceptions; yet which God suffered to be accompanied by evidence to gain it belief, such as is not possessed by any other book.

4. I believe that bad men are often made better, through the influence of this strange system of lies, delusions, and impostures ; and that those who were good men often become bad, as soon as they are wise enough to free themselves from such influence,

and to cast off the shackles with which this system encumbered them.

5. I believe that several of the best ~~men~~<sup>scholars,</sup> the ablest disputants, the most acute lawyers, the subtlest metaphysicians, the most cautious investigators, and the most profound philosophers, that ever lived, such as Sir Thomas More, Grotius, Hale, Bacon, Barrow, Locke, Hartley, Boyle, Pascal, Euler, Newton, and many others, were never able to detect the cheat, but lived as much under the influence of this system of bold and blasphemous deception, as the most vulgar and illiterate peasant could do;—and were, the majority of them, very excellent men notwithstanding.

6. I believe that the different persons who employed themselves at various times, and in different places, to compose the Bible, which avows itself, by a thousand most solemn and explicit declarations, to be a collection of communications from heaven, were not madmen, (for that supposition is untenable), but all shocking liars, and deceivers; that these wicked men, who thus impiously pretended to be employed by God, when they were not so employed, did, notwithstanding, with an amazing energy, resolution, and perseverance, go about doing good, and delivering the most important moral precepts; braving and often sustaining the greatest present evils; not one of them ever recanting or discovering the fraud; but

being supported in the daily diffusion of their noble precepts and detestable impostures, and the terrible sufferings which they thereby brought upon themselves, by the conviction that they had no hope but of experiencing further hardships here, and the vengeance of the God whom they had insulted—hereafter.

Lastly : I believe that the Great Being of infinite perfections, who sits enthroned at the head of the universe, has seen this horrid delusion to prevail more and more for nearly two thousand years ; yet, instead of interposing to stay its progress, has suffered it to be accompanied with the most remarkable apparent sanctions, and has often accelerated its promulgation by surprising operations and occurrences. That is, I believe that the God of truth has, with regard to what is called the Christian Religion, most astonishingly aided imposture. All this, I acknowledge, is perfectly incomprehensible, and totally irreconcileable with the obvious attributes of Deity : but it is consistent with the principles of Deism, however repugnant it may be to common sense, and therefore I believe it.

If these and similar absurdities, my friend, result from the rejection of Revelation, (and, as far as I am able to judge, they are not merely fair, but *necessary* consequences of such rejection,) your deistical acquaintances cannot have so much reason as

they suppose, to pride themselves on that noble exercise of their understanding which has freed them from vulgar prejudices and sordid restraints. Is it not, hence, probable that, in nineteen instances out of twenty, Deism springs more from the state of the heart than from the operations of intellect ? and that it is not so much because Christianity offends the reason, as because it condemns the conduct, of men, that they affect to despise it ? They commence their progress with a carelessness respecting their future interests : in the language of Young, they

—————“ Give to time eternity’s regard,  
“ And, dreaming, take their passage for their port.”

Gliding along thus carelessly, it is natural enough that they should sink,—first into error,—next into vice. In such a situation, an inquiry into the evidences of Revealed Religion is not instituted under very favourable auspices ; for the inquirer has his mind overgrown with the worst of all prejudices, those that are rooted in *interest*. How should a man be indifferent as to the truth of a system, which, if *true*, must condemn him ? Though his life may not be grossly immoral, he knows that the tenor of his conduct is incompatible with the renunciations and requirements of real religion. He comes, therefore, to the trial, not as an impartial judge, but as a party deeply interested in the issue. He in consequence wishes

that Christianity may not be true ; and what a man fervently wishes he can easily persuade himself to believe,—though he should involve himself in a thousand absurdities in consequence of that persuasion.

You, my friend, have happily entered upon this important inquiry, free from the lamentable incumbrances of vice : that it may be so pursued, as to be the mean of preserving you from the deistical delusions to which I have adverted in this letter,—delusions, as derogatory to the intellectual, as they are dangerous to the moral, character of man ; is the most earnest wish of

Your sincere Friend,

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Royal Military Academy,  
May, 1802.

## LETTER II.

### *On the Necessity of a Revelation of the Will of God.*

WHEN you request, my dear Friend, that I will not let the letter I recently sent to you terminate the remarks I mean to transmit on the subject of Religion, but that I will allow you to consider it as the first of a series which I shall devote to the discussion of the Evidences, Doctrines, and Duties of Christianity; you propose to me a task which, however willing I may be to undertake it on your account, will, I am aware, be attended with some difficulty, and require much time and attention. The difficulty does not arise from the paucity and scantiness of the materials that lie before me, and the consequent necessity of exercising original or inventive powers to produce such argumentative matter as may convince a candid inquirer; but from the extreme copiousness of the subject, the abundance and variety of the means by which it has been established, confirmed, and illustrated, and the judgment requisite to draw out of an immense mass, to which men of learning and piety in all ages of the Church have contributed, those particulars which may be best cal-

culated to impress the mind, and to call forth both a rational and a practical conviction. The lively interest, however, which I feel in all that concerns you, and my extreme solicitude that you should think correctly and act wisely in relation to this most momentous of all topics, induce me to comply with your wishes, notwithstanding the embarrassment in which this compliance may sometimes involve me: and I have only to premise, before I pursue the inquiry you have suggested, that as, on the one hand, I do not expect you will assent to every proposition I shall advance, but will be determined by the aggregate impression resulting from the whole; so, on the other, *you* must not expect to be entertained with novelties, or fascinated with beauties.

Nullum est jam dictum, quod non dictum prius. TEE.

My objects will be, to select—not to invent; to convince—not to compel; to instruct—not to delight; to persuade—not to enchant: and if I shall be so fortunate as to effect these without occupying very much of your time;—if I shall save you the fatigue of turning over many a ponderous volume, and the vexation of reading many in vain, (through the want of a judicious friend at your elbow to direct your choice);—if I can compress into small compass the most essential arguments that are diffused through numerous works of various authors in differ-

ent ages; and the result of my labour be beneficial to you, I shall have the satisfaction, the purest allotted to man, of having exerted myself successfully in a good cause.

Having premised this, I may venture to remark, that if the train of argumentation in my former letter is calculated to make any impression, it is, that the absurdities of Deism render a Revelation of the will of God probable. It may also be inferred further, that what we may naturally expect from the character of God, renders such a Revelation more probable; and we may now observe, that the state of man renders it necessary. It indeed seems extremely unlikely, that the Divine Being would suffer mankind to have fallen into such great apostacy from him as is every where manifest, without intending to render them assistance through which they may be recovered. He has made provision in the natural world for the removal of bodily disorders; can we then imagine that he will be altogether regardless of the much more dangerous diseases of the mind? It is, for example, a most deplorable degree of blindness, to live utterly unconcerned about what we are; and it is a far more tremendous thing to live wickedly, to live as "without God in the world," when we are surrounded with his essence, and believe in his existence: yet the greater part of mankind are under one or other of these dismal infatuations; and there can

be no reason assigned why they should ever be otherwise, unless they are roused from their slumber, or checked in their irreligious courses, by the voice of Deity.

Leave man to himself and to his own efforts, even when most actively inclined, and what can he accomplish? He is evidently formed for thinking; his intellectual part gives dignity to his character: to think correctly constitutes a prime duty; correct thinking is manifested in his contemplating himself, his author, and his end; and yet, how commonly does he neglect these inquiries to pursue trifling vanities, and "waste his strength in that which profiteth not?" Or suppose he directs his unassisted intellectual energies into a more suitable channel, what does he effect? He has an idea, an inward perception of truth, not to be effaced by the sophistry of the sceptic; yet, on the most important topics, he has an incapacity of argument scarcely to be satisfied but by supernatural aid. He wishes for truth, and obtains nothing but uncertainty. He pants after happiness, and finds only misery in substance, or the vacuity of disappointment. He is incapable of ceasing to wish both for truth and happiness; and yet perceives that he is equally incapable of attaining either certainty or felicity. He is also subject to a perpetual war between his reason and his passions. Had he reason without passions, or passions without

reason, he might enjoy something like repose : but actuated as he is by both, he lives in perpetual disquiet ; finding it impossible to yield himself to the guidance of the one, without experiencing the consequences of rebellion to the other. Hence he is always at variance with himself,—always under the influence of contending principles ; and how is he to emancipate himself from this thralldom ? Suppose he seeks for freedom and repose, by pursuing the speculations of *Natural Religion*. He endeavours to lay the foundations of duty, to establish rules of conduct ; he attempts to put them in practice, and *fails*. He is compelled to acknowledge himself a wanderer, and often doubtless a *wilful* wanderer, from the path of rectitude. He reasons without knowing it, upon the principles of an Apostle, who said, “*if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and will condemn us also;*” and is thus led to institute inquiries relative to the pardon of sin, the nature, duration, misery, or happiness of a future state ; respecting all which he finds it impossible to remove difficulties, or to be freed from the most trembling anxiety :

“The wide, the unbounded prospect lies before him ;  
“But shadows, clouds, and darkness, rest upon it.”

Even of those things which such an inquirer may be able to clear up to his own satisfaction, there will

be many which it will be extremely difficult to communicate to *others*; considering, on the one hand, how abstruse many of his arguments will be; and on the other, that ignorance, indolence, prejudice, and secular cares, will, according to their individual or combined existence and influence, prevent the generality of persons from inquiring into the truth of what he proposes, as well as from investigating these matters for themselves.

Could the doubts which envelope the subject of Natural Religion be dispelled, by any one philosopher, to his own satisfaction, yet he *might* want the inclination, or, if he possessed that, he *must* want the power to make others adept his views, and thus taste his enjoyments. Or could the great doctrines of religion and the rules of morality be settled, and proposed, and taught, ever so plainly or frequently, yet it would be difficult, or indeed impossible, to enforce the practice of them. A system of ethics may be considered, by those who acquaint themselves with it, as extremely ingenious; but it is entirely optional whether they will adopt it as a rule of conduct; and the experience of all ages shows that it is perfectly ridiculous to expect that any such system should ever be considered as binding. Even were human laws established in aid of it, it would still be ineffectual; for no secular power, however it may restrain from crimes, can produce a single

action that shall be truly and essentially virtuous. Either, then, God himself must interpose and favour us with rules of virtue, and motives to the practice of it, such as it is difficult to withstand,—or the world must necessarily sink deeper and deeper into vice and misery. To admit the latter is to deny that the Supreme Being interests himself about the welfare of those whom he created and governs. Since, therefore, God is a being of matchless justice, mercy, and bounty, it follows, irrefragably, that if the deficiencies of natural reason, or the inattention of mankind to the footsteps of his providence, were such at any time (and such they *have been*) that all the inhabitants of the world were in danger of being lost in ignorance, irreligion, and idolatry, then would God interpose by extraordinary instruction, by alarming instances of judgment or of mercy, by prophetical declarations of things to come,—that is by a supernatural revelation of his will, to make us better acquainted with his attributes and our own character,—to point out to us the path of duty, to lead us from the vanities of the world, and to draw us to himself.

I am, &c.

June, 1809.

## LETTER III.

*On the Opinions of the Heathens, their Poets, and Philosophers, relative to God, to Moral Duty, and a Future State.*

IT is not surprising, my dear Friend, that your philosophical companions should endeavour to persuade you, in opposition to the train of argument in my last letter, that unassisted reason not only can discover, but *has* discovered, all that is necessary to be known, as it regards our duty or our expectations. The powers of the intellect, notwithstanding their defects and their limitations, have doubtless done much in every department of art, of literature, and of science: and those who are best able to estimate the value of intellectual productions, are probably, for that very reason, apt to ascribe to the mind much more than it can really accomplish. Besides this, several of the philosophers who have indulged in moral speculations since the æra of the Christian revelation, and even those who have been the warmest opposers of that revelation, have derived, indirectly, from the source to which they would disdain to apply directly, many highly important truths, many valuable rules of conduct, many powerful incentives to

virtue : they have thus travelled by a torch snatched from the temple of God, while both themselves and their followers idly imagine their path is illuminated by light of their own creating. But, to judge correctly in this respect, let us inquire what was effected in morals and religion by the intellectual energies of the great and learned men and philosophers who existed previously to the dawn of “ the sun of righteousness.” Such an inquiry will place the subject in a proper point of view ; nor can it be thought uncandid towards the advocates of unassisted reason, when it is recollected that, whatever may have been the mental stature of Bolingbroke, and Gibbon, and Hume, and Voltaire, they would appear as dwarfs when placed by the side of Aristotle, and Socrates, and Plato, and Seneca. If then this inquiry, conducted with as much regard to brevity as its nature will admit, shall evince the inferiority of the principal ethical and religious systems of the ancients to the Christian scheme, or shall show their inefficacy to restrain from vice, or to incite to virtue, we shall possess an additional argument for the necessity of Revelation, as well as a cogent proof that the system which is so infinitely superior to all that has been produced by the greatest of uninspired men, must have emanated from Him who is “ the Father of lights,” physical and mental.

Now, as to the heathens generally, though it was

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commonly admitted among them that the formation of the world was owing to chance, yet many of them ascribed it to a plurality of causes or authors : and even those who acknowledged one Supreme Being corrupted the doctrine of the *unity*, by making him to be of the same nature as the other gods, though of a higher order. And thus originated the custom of the priests, who, in all their sacred ceremonies and devotions, after addressing themselves to the especial deities to whom it was necessary at each particular time to offer up prayers or sacrifices, were wont to invoke *all the gods in general*. It was, besides, an universal notion among them, that the Supreme God did not concern himself with the affairs of this world, but committed them wholly to inferior deities ; whence sprang their idolatry, and the habit of neglecting the worship of the Supreme God, or of confounding it with that of the multitude of idol-deities. They first deviated from the worship of one God, to the worshipping heaven and the heavenly bodies ; then to the worship of heroes and deified men ; then they turned the names and attributes of God into distinct divinities, and worshipped them as such ; then they paid divine honours to the images and symbols of the gods ; and then they deified whatever was useful in human life, however mean,—and the qualities, affections, and dispositions of the human mind, however grovelling and despicable. The con-

sequence of all this was that, at length, the worship of *evil* beings became very prevalent. Hence many of their rites became cruel and contrary to humanity ; and hence the licentiousness and impurity of their religion and worship became notorious. Thus, to select only one or two instances out of many, the rites of the goddess Cybele were no less infamous for lewdness than for cruelty ; and these impure customs spread far and wide. Strabo relates that there was a temple of Venus at Corinth so rich that it maintained above a thousand harlots sacred to her service, *ἱεροδολίαις ἐταιραῖς*, which were consecrated both by men and women to that goddess. And Eusebius (in his *Prepar. Evangel.* lib. ii. cap. 6, p. 74) is compelled to use language, when describing the height of wickedness and impurity the worship of the heathens attained, which no virtuous man can read without shuddering. Well might it be said of the heathens by an Apostle, “ God gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts.” The vices and enormities in which the heathens indulged, were not checked by any suitable restraining motive : for, whatever might be the speculative opinions of one or two philosophers, the belief of a future state was totally set at nought by the majority of both Greeks and Romans. Thus, according to Plato, the doctrine taught by Socrates, concerning the immortality of the soul and a future state, “ met

with little credit among men :" and indeed Socrates himself remarked that the opinion of the soul's being *blown away*, and perishing with the body, prevailed generally. Polybius also complains that in his time the belief of a future state was rejected both by the great men and the bulk of the people, and he ascribes to this disbelief the great corruption of manners : though even Polybius, while he blames the great men among the Greeks for encouraging the people to disbelieve and despise future punishments, represents them as only *useful fictions*. How much the disbelief of future retributions prevailed at Rome is evident from one of Cæsar's orations on the Catiline conspiracy ; and Cato's reply, in which he said " Cæsar looked upon those things to be fables which are related concerning the *Inferi*, where bad men, far from the mansions of the virtuous, are confined to abodes, dreary, abominable, and full of horrors." Long after the time of Cæsar the like contempt of an awful futurity was entertained : for Pliny the naturalist labours hard to expose the absurdity of ascribing immortality to the soul, and says " that these are childish and senseless fictions of mortals, who are ambitious of a never-ending existence." " Puerilium ista deliramentorum, avideaque nunquam desinere mortalitatis commenta sunt." (a)

(a) Hist. Nat. lib. vii. cap. 55.

That a contempt and disbelief of future punishments weakened the *fear* of God, is obvious : and as to the *love* of God, that noble principle which is evidently fitted to produce the most elevated degrees of moral uprightness, and a happiness corresponding to our sublimest desires, the heathens were utter strangers to it. And with regard to their conduct towards one another, it must not be forgotten that none of them recognised the exalted principle of *loving enemies*. I am aware that some have affirmed that this principle was taught in the Grecian schools, and have referred to the *Gorgias* of Plato in proof of their assertion. But, if we attend duly to the whole conversation of Socrates there related, we shall find that, instead of teaching the forgiveness of injuries, the love of enemies, and the duty of "doing good to them that hate us," he inculcates the indulgence of the most refined, and, according to his own statement, the most baleful malice towards those who have injured us. The substance of his reasoning is this : " You allow that moral excellence is the greatest good. You allow also that the punishment of offences is one mean of reforming the authors of them. If then our enemy has injured us, the greatest good we can bestow upon him is to bring him to a court of justice, and inflict the vengeance of the law. Then by no means punish your enemy for having injured you, for so you defeat your own pur-

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*pose of revenge. Leave him to the whole, uncontrolled, uncounteracted, influence of his moral depravity, because that is the greatest evil which can be endured."*

It appears, then, that the heathen world, and especially the Greeks and Romans, of whom we know most because they were most refined, were in a state of gross darkness and ignorance with respect to the knowledge of God, of themselves, and of those moral relations and obligations in which they stood to the Supreme Being, and to one another. Their incentives to virtue were few and weak : their motives to avoid vice ineffectual and founded on a wrong basis. Nor was this the case with regard to the populace merely : their Legislators, Poets, and Philosophers, held the most erroneous opinions ; or promulgated right sentiments, when they had discovered them, upon wrong principles. Thus, with regard to LEGISLATORS, it is well known that from *political* views they established and encouraged the worship of those who had once been men, and took them into the number of their gods. Consistently with this, Cotta observes, that in most cities it was usual, in order to encourage men to hazard their lives for the commonwealth, to take those who had been eminent for their fortitude into the number of their gods. This indeed is expressly prescribed by Cicero, in his second book of laws (cap. viii.) where

he requires that those should be worshipped whom their merits had called into heaven. It is also a general observation, which applies to the whole civil theology of the pagans, that of the Romans as well as of the other heathen nations, that the public worship which was instituted by their more celebrated legislators, and prescribed and established by the laws of their several cities and countries, was paid to a *multiplicity of deities*. They were therefore encouraged, or rather *compelled*, to be polytheists, by law.

It has, I am aware, been urged by some, that the legislators who established the pagan mysteries designed thereby to overthrow the vulgar polytheism. But, in opposition to this, it has been shown by Bishop Warburton that "the legislators and magistrates who first instituted the mysteries, and continued to have the chief direction of them, had the chief hand in the rise of that polytheism, and contrived it for the sake of the state, to keep the people in awe, and under a greater veneration for their laws."

So far, indeed, was it from being the fact that heathen legislators discountenanced polytheism, that the whole tenor of ancient records goes to establish the contrary. Thus, Stobæus informs us, it was one of the laws of Charondas, "Let the contempt of the gods be reckoned among the greatest crimes." And at Athens every citizen was bound by oath to defend

and conform to the religion of his country. This oath was in the name of the gods, and concluded thus: "I swear by these following deities, the Agrauli, Enyalius, Mars, Jupiter, the Earth, and Diana." (6)

Nor did the legislators inculcate erroneous notions with regard to the gods alone. Their laws, established for the express purpose of furthering the public virtue and happiness, had often a highly unfavourable effect upon both. I shall here only specify a few of these of Lycurgus, because the united voice of antiquity speaks of him as rather a god than a man, and Plutarch produces him as "an undeniable proof that a perfectly wise man is not a mere notion and chimera." I am not inclined to deny that many of the laws of Lycurgus are very excellent; yet I must be permitted to think that some things, enacted by this "perfectly wise man," counteracted the practice of virtue. Plato, though a great admirer of Lycurgus, acknowledges that his laws were rather fitted to make men valiant than just. Aristotle makes the same observation. And even Plutarch confesses that some persons censured the laws of Lycurgus as well contrived to make men good soldiers, but *very defective in civil justice and honesty*. Many of his laws were contrary to humanity: and hence it happened

(6) Potter's Greek Antiquities, vol. I.

that the conduct of the Lacedemonians to their slaves, the helotes, was proverbially cruel. They had besides a custom, encouraged by their laws, of whipping boys to death at the altar of Diana Orthia. Lycurgus also enacted that deformed infants should not be suffered to live, but be cast into a cavern to perish gradually! Healthy boys, on the contrary, were to be treated charily, and trained up to *dextrous thieving*, being whipped unmercifully if they were taken in the fact, not for stealing, but for being such bunglers as to expose themselves to detection. I will only add farther, under this head, that the Spartans had common baths, in which both men and women were compelled to bathe together; and that it was ordered by Lycurgus that the young maidens should appear naked in the public exercises, as well as the young men; and that they should dance naked with them at the solemn festivals and sacrifices. These you will remember are among the legislative enactments of one whom we are to respect as a "perfectly wise man;" and these are laws which a learned, grave, and philosophic heathen, Plutarch, justifies and commends, seeming scarcely conscious, except in one instance, that it would be possible to censure them.

Allow me next to say a word or two respecting the heathen POETS, whose influence upon the opinions and practices of the people was naturally great. They

were, indeed, the prophets and chief instructors of the people, and were looked upon, even by Socrates and Plato, as divinely inspired. Now, how did they maintain the ancient tradition of one Supreme God? Why, truly, by confounding him with their Jupiter, by bringing him to a level with this the chief of their idol-deities, of whom they made the most indelicate representations. Instead of exerting the powers of their imagination to array the Deity in the sublimity of grandeur, or even in pointing to the obscurity which invests the most incomprehensible of all beings, and

—“With the majesty of darkness round  
“Circles his throne;”—

they invented ideal gods of all classes, and for all purposes, even the most base and ignoble : they deified the inanimate parts of the world ; they ascribed to their deities passions and propensities the most odious and abominable ; and instead of describing the gods as beings worthy of imitation, and giving richness and elevation of character to men by the contemplation of *their* excellence, they lowered and debased the sentiments of those who were already “of the earth, earthly,” by calling their attention to monstrous and indecent stories of the intrigues of heaven. The poetical theology, it is true, was disapproved by some of the wiser pagans ; yet it was care-

fully wrought into the popular religion, and lay at the foundation of most of their sacred rites. Those poetical fables which Varro and Tully (*a*) censure as unworthy of the gods, and as imputing to them actions which none but the vilest of men could be guilty of, were not only permitted to be acted on the public theatres, but were regarded as things pleasing to the gods themselves, and were accordingly incorporated with the public and established religion.

The effusions of the heathen poets have also a despicably mischievous tendency, on account of the manner in which they almost uniformly speak of the state after death. On some few occasions, it is true, they introduce the idea of rewards and punishments to make a part of the poetical machinery; yet, frequently they express themselves as though they thought death brought an utter extinction of being. Plutarch, in his consolation to Apollonius, quotes this passage of an ancient poet, that no grief or evil touches the dead,

"Ἄλγος γέδε οὐτος; οὐδὲ αὐτισταί νηρός.

He there also quotes another passage from a poet, declaring that the dead man is in the same condition he was before he was born. The first of these passages is ascribed by Stobæus to Æschylus. So again,

(*a*) Fingebat haec Homerus, et humana ad deos transferebat, divina mallem ad nos. *Tuseul. Disput. lib. i. cap. 29.*

Moschus, Idyll iii. lin. 107, having observed that herbs and plants, after seeming to die, yet revive in the succeeding year, subjoins,

Διηγες δὲ μεγαλοι, ητι και τρεσ, ο τερπνοι φυδεσι  
 Οπητοι πρωτα Σεμειοι, απεκοιν χθονι κοιλα  
 Ευδομες εγ μαλα ΜΑΚΡΟΝ, ΑΤΕΡΜΩΝ, ΝΗΓΕΡΙΩΝ οντων.

But we, or great, or wise, or brave,  
 Once dead, and silent in the grave,  
 Senseless remain ; one rest we keep,  
 One long, eternal, unawaken'd sleep.

There are passages of the same kind in Epichar-mus, in Sophocles, Euripides, and Astydamas, referred to by Dr. Whitby. (d)

Both the Greek and Roman poets drew arguments from the consideration that life is short, and death will *entirely* terminate our existence, to urge men to lay hold on the present opportunity, and give a full indulgence to their appetites ; according to the libertine maxim, “ let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we ‘ die.’” Several passages of this kind may be found in Strato, and others of the Greeks. Catullus has a notorious passage to the same purpose, which, often as it has been quoted, must once more be adduced :

“ Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus——  
 “ Soles occidere et redire possunt:  
 “ Nobis cum semel accidit brevis lux,  
 “ Non est perpetua una dormienda.”

(d) Whitby's Commentary on 2 Tim. i. 16.

Thus also Horace,

“ *Vita summa brevis spem nos vetat inchoare longam :*  
“ *Jam nos te premet fabulaque Manes.*”

Perseus, again, represents it as the language of many in his time.

“ *Indulge genia : carpamus dulcia : nostrum est*  
“ *Quod vivis : cisis et Manes et fabula fies.*”

Quotations to this effect may be multiplied at pleasure, by any person who is conversant with the productions of the classic poets. I shall only select two more ; the first from Seneca the tragedian :

“ *Post mortem nihil est, ipsaque mors nihil—*  
“ *Quæris quo jaceas post obitum loco,*  
“ *Quo non nata jacent.*”

And Virgil, *AEn.* x.

“ *Olli dura quies oculos, et ferreus urget,*  
“ *Somnus, in aeternam clauduntur lumina noctem.*”

We have now seen that the sentiments of the legislators and poets, in regard to religion and morals, differed in nothing essentially from those of the *οἱ πόλιαι*; much as they prided themselves upon their superiority to that multitudinous class. Let us next take a rapid glance at those opinions of the PHILOSOPHERS which are connected with our present inquiry, and ascertain whether St. Paul, who

was well acquainted with the philosophical notions of his and all preceding times, was not justified in saying to the Colossians, " Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit."

Now that this branch of our inquiry may not be loaded with any superfluous matter, I do not hesitate to admit that some of the ancient philosophers had very sublime conceptions respecting the nature and a few of the attributes of God, some of them spake nobly of virtue in general, and some indulged in exalted speculations relative to the immortality of the soul. Yet there was a strange confusion and diversity of sentiments among them respecting the Deity: and a complete system of morality was not to be found in the writings of any one philosopher, nor of all of them collectively. Some of them excluded a divine mind and intelligence from the formation of the universe: few, if any of them, acknowledged God in a proper sense to be the Creator of the world: most of them encouraged polytheism. Some taught that God is the soul of the world: some, that the world is God: some, that the world is eternal both in matter and form: some, that the stars are to be worshipped: the greatest and best of them spoke of a plurality of gods, whom they recommended to the adoration of the people. They justified the worship of images: they apologised even for the Egyptian animal worship: they added metaphysical deities to

the popular ones : they referred the people for instruction to the priests and the oracles ; and gave it as a general rule, that all men should conform to the religion of their country, that is, to polytheism. The best of them, amidst all their arguments, often spoke *doubtfully* of a future state, and none of them applied the doctrine of a future state to its proper ends and uses : they affirmed, that a short and temporary happiness is as good as an eternal one ; and few of them believed future punishments. In regard to morals, they were generally wrong in that part which relates to purity, and continence, and the government of the sensual passions. Many of them, as Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, *Æschines*, Cebes, &c. were chargeable with unnatural lusts and vices, which they reckoned among things of an indifferent nature.(e) They generally allowed of fornication, as having nothing in it sinful, or contrary to reason. Many of them pleaded for suicide, as lawful and proper in some cases ; and most of them thought lying lawful when it was profitable. Thus, Plato says, " he may lie who knows how to do it, *εν διοντι καιρῳ*, " in a fitting or needful season." In his fifth Republic he lays it down as a maxim, that it is " necessary for rulers to make use of frequent lying and

(e) *Inceps omnigenus, adulterium, et etiam ἀστραμβία, veterum nonnullis, sapientiae nomine claris, inter dissimiles habebantur.* *Canon. chronic. secud. ix. p. 172.*

“deceit, for the benefit of their subjects, συχνώ τῷ  
“ψέυδαι καὶ απάτῃ χρῆθαι.” In his third and  
fourth books De Republica, he advises governors to  
make use of lies both towards enemies and citizens,  
when it is convenient. In his second book De Re-  
publica, he allows lying in words on some occasions;  
but not lying in the soul, so as to believe a falsehood.  
And in this he was followed by the Stoics, who held  
that a wise man might make use of a lie many ways,  
ἀνεύ συγκαταθέσεως, without giving assent to it; as  
in war, in prospect of some advantage, and for many  
other conveniences and managements of life, κατ’  
αλλας ὀικονομίας τῇ οὐ πόλλας. Consistently with  
this, Maximus Tyrius says, “there is nothing vene-  
“rable, εἰδὲν σεμνόν, in truth, if it be not profitable  
“to him that hears it.” He adds, that “a lie is of-  
“ten profitable or advantageous to men, and truth  
“hurtful.” Thus it appears how apt they were to  
mistake in judging of what is truly venerable, deco-  
rous, and laudable, which yet they made one of the  
principal characteristics of the τὸ καλὸν, or honestum.  
Plato mentions it as an old saying, and which  
he approves, that that which is profitable is καλὸν,  
honourable, and that which is hurtful is base. Since,  
therefore, both he and others of the philosophers  
held that a lie is, in many cases, profitable, they  
must hold that a lie is often καλὸν, honestum. Some

of the philosophers, again, as Laertius tells us of Theodorus, declared without disguise, that “ a wise man might, upon a fit occasion, commit theft, adultery, and sacrilege; for that none of those things are base in their own nature, if that opinion concerning them be taken away, which was agreed upon for the sake of restraining fools.” (f) Besides all this, they were, as Diodorus Siculus testifies, continually innovating in the most considerable doctrines, and, by perpetually contradicting one another, made their disciples dubious ; so that their minds were kept in such continual suspense during their whole lives, that they could not firmly believe anything.

From this induction of particulars you may perceive that, with regard to men of learning and strong intellect among the heathens, reason, so far as it related to God, and religion, and human happiness, was asleep : if some happy hints at any time awoke it, and set it moving in a right direction, yet without the guidance of revelation, it was ever ready to wander and go astray. As this, however, is a very interesting topic, you will, perhaps, expect that I should specify some of the erroneous notions taught by the most celebrated philosophers. I will, therefore, select a few instances for your information.

(f) Diog. Laert. lib. ii. segm. 99.

SOCRATES, you will, I doubt not, recollect, (g) was the first among the Greeks who made morals the proper and only subject of his philosophy, and brought it into common life. Yet he represents the worshipping not of one God, but of *the gods*, as the first and most universal law of nature ; and he was in the habit of consulting the oracle to know the will of the gods. He sometimes gives a noble account of future happiness ; but seems to confine it principally, as several of the modern deists do, to those who had made a great progress in philosophy. “ The soul,” says he, “ which gives itself up to the study of wisdom and “ philosophy, and lives abstracted from the body, “ goes at death to that which is like itself,—divine, “ immortal, wise,—to which, when it arrives, it shall “ be happy, freed from error, ignorance, fears, dis-“ orderly loves, and other human evils ; and lives, as “ is said of the initiated, the rest of its life with the “ gods.” This philosopher, however, mixes his doctrine of a future state with that of the *transmigration* of souls, and gives a mean idea of the happiness reserved for the common sort of good and virtuous men after death : “ They go,” he says, “ into the bodies of “ animals of a mild and social kind, such as bees, “ ants, &c. But none is admitted to the fellowship “ of the gods, but a lover of *knowledge*.” What an

(g) Tuscul. Disput. lib. v. cap. 4.

admirable incitement is this to the practice of virtue, that a virtuous man of moderate intellect may be indulged with the privilege of animating the bodies of bees and ants ! It must be farther remarked, that most of the arguments produced by Socrates, in the Phædo, for the immortality of the soul, were weak and inconclusive : and, accordingly, although he expressed a *hope* of it in his last discourse when he was near death, yet he by no means spoke confidently. He concludes his long discussion relative to the state of souls after death, by saying, " That these things " are so as I have represented them, it does not be- " come any man of understanding to affirm." In his apology to his judges, he comforts himself with the consideration, that " there is much ground to *hope* " that death is good : for it must necessarily be one " of these two; either the dead man is nothing, and " has not a sense of any thing ; or it is only a change " or migration of the soul hence to another place, " according to what we are told. If there is no sense " left, and *death is like a profound sleep, and quiet rest without dreams, it is WONDERFUL TO THINK WHAT GAIN IT IS TO DIE*; but if the things which " are told us are true, that death is a migration to " another place, this is still a much greater good." And soon after, having said, that " those who live " there, are both in other respects happier than we, " and also in this, that for the rest of their existence

"they are immortal;" he again reiterates, "*If the things which are told us are true.*" You cannot fail to notice, that in all this the awful idea of accountability does not enter; and farther, that, instead of the philosopher's adopting the language of sublimity and confidence on this momentous occasion, he deals only in puerility and uncertainty. Let but his hesitating language be contrasted with the Christian confidence of an Apostle in analogous circumstances, and you cannot help drawing the most cogent inferences. The language of the dying philosopher is, "*If the things which are told us are true.*" Now listen to the language of the Apostolic conqueror, and rejoice that his confidence in the face of death may be yours. "I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness: which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." "I know in whom I have believed; and am PERSUADED that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."

You will not be surprised, after all this, to learn that Socrates recommended divinization, and was addicted to incontinence and fornication. But it is

time for us to direct our attention to his great disciple, PLATO. I have already adverted to the encouragement this philosopher gave to the habit of lying. He farther prescribes a community of wives in his commonwealth ; gives great liberties to incontinency ; allows, and in some cases prescribes, the exposing and destroying children, namely, the children of mothers older than forty years, or of fathers older than fifty-five ;(h) allows of drunkenness at the feasts of Bacchus, though not at other times ; and prescribes the worship of the *stars*, which, indeed, are the divinities he principally recommends to the people. He seems sometimes to have believed in one Supreme God, but never thought it safe or proper to proclaim him to the vulgar ; on the contrary, he directs them to follow the Delphian oracle, as the best guide in matters of religion. He held two principles of things, God and matter : but, according to him, the first and highest God was not concerned in the creation, nor is in the government of the world. Like his master, Socrates, he often asserts the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. Sometimes he argues for the immortality of the soul, on the ground of its pre-existence. He sometimes recommends the doctrine of future punishments as a most ancient and sacred tradition : yet at other times

(A) Plato, *Republica*, lib. v.

he expresses himself in a manner that seems not to admit of punishments in a future state; and finds fault with such representations, as tending to alarm the people, and make them afraid of death. "All those direful and terrible names (says he) respecting the ghosts of the dead are to be regretted, which cause such as hear them to shudder and tremble." And in his Cratylus he introduces Socrates as blaming those who represent Hades as a dark and gloomy abode, and derive the word from τὸ ἄτιττος, as if it were void of light; but is rather for deriving it αὐτὸς τὸ πάντα τὰ καλὰ εἰδίναι, from knowing all things good and beautiful. Here he manifestly excludes every thing from the notion of a future state that might be apt to create terror, and thus leaves no room for future misery.

ARISTOTLE, that great master of reasoning and of criticism, whose power was such as to establish a mental despotism which prevailed universally for thousands of years, was childish enough in matters of religion to affirm most positively that though there was one eternal first mover, yet the stars are also triε eternal deities.(i) He likewise denied that providence extends its care to things below the moon; approves; nay prescribes, the exposing and destroying sickly children; encourages revenge, and speaks of meek-

(i) Arist. Metaphys. lib. xiv. cap. 8.

ness as seeming to err by defect, "because the meek man is not apt to avenge himself, but rather to forgive."(j) He varies in his doctrine with regard to future existence, and sometimes absolutely denies it, as in chapter 9, book iii. of the Nicomachian Ethics, where he asserts that "death is the most dreadful of all things, for that it is the end of our existence: to him that is dead there seems nothing farther to remain, whether good or evil."

Having dwelt thus long upon the Greek philosophers, I cannot dilate much upon the sentiments of those who wrote in the Latin language. I shall, however, select CICERO as a very fair specimen of those who flourished before the Christian æra. Now this great man, it is well known, would not allow that God created the matter out of which the universe was made; and besides this, he commonly expressed himself after the manner of the polytheists. In arguing for the existence of God, he leads the people to a plurality of deities; and he asserts expressly that the *Dii majorum gentium*, those that were accounted gods of the higher order, were taken from among men. Indeed he very much approves the custom of paying divine honours to famous men, and regarding them as gods.(k) He argues excellently for the immortality of the soul in several parts of his

(j) Ethic. ad Nicomach. lib. iv. cap. 11.

(k) De Natura Deorum, lib. ii. cap. 24.

works ; yet sometimes, in his letters to his friends, represents death as putting an end to all sense of good or evil. Thus, in an epistle to L. Mescinius, he says, death ought to be despised, or even wished for, because it will be void of all sense. “ Propterea “ quod nullum sensum esset habitura.” And again, in an epistle to Torquatus, he comforts himself with this thought: ‘ Whilst I shall exist, I shall not be ‘ troubled at any thing, since I have no fault with ‘ which to charge myself; and if I shall not exist, I ‘ shall be deprived of all sense.’ “ Nec enim dum-“ ero, angar ulla re, cum omni caream culpā ; et si “ non ero, sensu omni carebo.” He makes no use, at any time, of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul for moral purposes, either for supporting men under their troubles, or for stimulating them to the practice of virtue : and the notion of future punishments is absolutely rejected and derided by him. In his notorious oration for Aulus Cluentius, he speaks of the punishments of the wicked as *silly fables*, and adds, “ if these things are false, as all men “ understand them to be, what has death taken from “ him (that is, from Oppianicus, a man whom Cicero himself represents as a monster of wickedness, guilty of the most atrocious murders, &c.) “ but a *sense of pain*.” After all this you will not be surprised at being told, that Cicero often commends and justifies suicide; and warmly pleads for

fornication, as having nothing blameable in it, and as universally allowed and practised.

I might next proceed to speak of **PLINY**, who openly argues against a future state ; (*l*) of **PLUTARCH**, who treats the fear of future punishment as vain and childish, and wrote his book of **Isis and Osiris** as an apology for the Pagan polytheism ; of **CATO** of Utica, who has been held up as “ a perfect model of virtue,” but who lent his wife to Hortensius, was an habitual drunkard, (*m*) and taught and practised self murder ; and of **SENECA**, who pleads for suicide, justifies Cato’s drunkenness, asserts that no man in his reason fears the gods, and contemns future punishments as vain terrors invented by the poets : but a detailed account of their sentiments and opinions would, in all the main points, be so strictly similar to what I have related of the other wise men of antiquity, that I omit it rather than render this letter tautologous and tiresome.

Before I terminate the present discussion, however, I cannot avoid remarking that several of the heathen philosophers, instead of being puffed up with vain ideas of the powers of their own understanding when directed to religious and moral inquiries (as most modern Deists are), frequently acknowledged their own impotency and blindness.

(*l*) *Hist. Nat. lib. vii. cap. 55.*

(*m*) *Seneca, De Tranquillitate Animi, cap. ult.*

Thus Tully, aware of the little that human creatures can do of themselves, says expressly ‘ Nemo ‘ vir magnus sine aliquo afflato divine unquam fuit:’ “ No man was ever truly great without some *divine influence.*” And Plato (whether from the recollection of the traditions he gathered while he was in Egypt, or whether ’twas

“ the divinity that *stirr'd* within him,”

I pretend not to determine,) concludes,(n) that we cannot know *of ourselves* what petition will be pleasing to God, or what worship to pay him; but that it is necessary a lawgiver should be sent from heaven to instruct us; and such a one he did expect: and “ O,” says he, “ how greatly do I desire to see that “ man, and who he is!” Nay, he goes farther, and says(o) that this Lawgiver must be *more than man*: for, since every nature is governed by another nature that is superior to it, as birds and beasts by man, he infers that this lawgiver, who was *to teach man what man could not know by his own nature*, must be of a nature superior to man, that is, of a divine nature. But, farther still, he gives in another place as lively a picture of the person, qualifications, life, and death, of this divine man, as if he had been ac-

(n) Alcibiad. ii. de Precat.

(o) De Legibus, lib. iv.

quainted with the 53d chapter of Isaiah : for he says (*p*)  
“ that this just person must be poor, and void of all  
“ recommendations but that of virtue alone ; that  
“ a wicked world would not bear his instructions and  
“ reproof ; and therefore within three or four years  
“ after he began to preach, he should be persecuted,  
“ imprisoned, scourged, and at last put to death.”

I have now, my dear Friend, presented you with a summary of the most striking opinions of the ancient Legislators, Poets, and Philosophers, with regard to Superior Beings, to human conduct, and a future state : if it be asked, what is the tendency of the sentiments of any one philosopher, or of the aggregate of them, to elevate the conceptions in respect of Deity, to purify the affections, to humanise the heart, to amend the conduct ? the reply is lamentably obvious—*nothing*. What principle in theology, or what rule in morals, has any one of them, or have all of them, indubitably established ? How many of the doctrines of what is now called *Natural Religion* did any of them hold ? The four great propositions which the moderns almost universally concede to Natural Religion, as integral parts of it, are,  
“ 1st. That there is one God. 2dly. That God is  
“ nothing of those things which we see. 3dly. That  
“ God takes care of all things below, and governs

(p) *De Republica*, i. ii.

“ all the world. 4thly. That he alone is the great “ Creator of all things out of himself.” Now they are incontrovertible facts, which cannot be too deeply engraven upon the mind, that none of the greatest and wisest men among the Greeks, and Romans, held *all* these propositions, and that very few held *any* of them firmly; that before the Christian era no people in the world believed these propositions but the Jews; and that they did not *discover* them, but received them by divine Revelation, in the basis of the first four precepts of the decalogue. Let also the idolizers of the powers of reason, in the development of religious truths, have it equally impressed upon their minds, that none of the heathen philosophers attempted a solution to the question, “ How “ shall a sinner appear before the God whose laws he “ has broken?” and that none of them made even a remote approximation to that simple, comprehensive, and admirable rule of moral conduct, “ Do unto “ others as you would they should do unto you:” and then, I trust, they will be constrained to acknowledge that the Apostle of the Gentiles was not indulging a flight of enthusiasm, but was simply urged forward by the force of truth, when he broke out into the triumphant exclamation—“ Where is the wise? “ where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this “ world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of “ this world? For after that in the wisdom of God

“ the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased  
“ God by the foolishness of preaching to save them  
“ that believe !”(q)

I remain,

Dear Sir,

Your's truly,

P. S. You will, perhaps, be surprised that I have not in this letter taken any notice of *Zoroaster*, of whom many Deists have so much to tell. I have omitted all recital of his supposed opinions for two reasons : 1st. Dr. Hyde has shown, in his treatise *De Religione veterum Persarum*, that *Zoroaster* had been a disciple of one of the Jewish prophets : and, 2dly. all the writings that are ascribed to this philosopher, are *unquestionably spurious*.

(q) 1 Corinthians, i. 20, 21.

## LETTER IV.

### *On the Probability that there should be Mysteries in a Revealed Religion.*

YOUR deistical friends, my dear Sir, seem determined to contend zealously for every inch of ground before they yield it. But this is not to be regretted ; for our future progress will be facilitated in proportion to the number of obstacles that are completely removed at the outset of our inquiry. When they tell you they will believe nothing that they cannot comprehend, and that the Scriptures are unworthy of credit, because they abound in mysteries, they adopt the language of unbelievers in all ages. But these declarations prove that they have never correctly investigated the power and office of reason in matters of religion, and at the same time run counter to their whole plan of conduct in relation to all except religious subjects : for who is there that does not believe numerous facts which are utterly incomprehensible ; and reduce principles into practice, which are beyond, though not repugnant to, reason ?

It is, indeed, in a neglect of the essential distinction between what is above reason, and what is con-

trary to it, that the objection now under consideration is founded. Yet surely nothing can be more obvious than that many things, beyond the scope of our intellectual powers, may nevertheless be perfectly true. When we were children, several matters were to us entirely incomprehensible, which have now sunk into the simplest, and lowest, and plainest elements of our knowledge. We were then learners ; docility became us ; and we were highly reprehensible if we set up our puny understandings against that of our tutors. Now, in the bestowal of a revelation, the principle is assumed that men are in a state of pupilage. The God of infinite wisdom condescends to be their teacher ; and it therefore behoves them, on such an occasion, to employ their reason solely for the purpose of ascertaining whether what is presented to them be really the word of God, and then to resign their understandings wholly to the adoption of the truths with which they are favoured. This is consistent with what is prescribed by that great philosopher Lord Bacon, who directs that reason be employed in studying " Holy mysteries, with this caution, that the mind for its module be dilated to the amplitude of the mysteries ; and not the mysteries be straitened and girt into the narrow compass of the mind." He says again, in his Advancement of Learning, " We ought not to attempt to draw down, or submit the mysteries of God to our rea-

" son ; but, on the contrary, to raise and advance  
" our reason to the divine truth. In this part of  
" knowledge, touching divine philosophy, I am so  
" far from noting any deficiency, that I rather note  
" an excess whereto I have digressed, because of the  
" extreme prejudice which both religion and philo-  
" sophy have received from being *commixed together*,  
" as that which will undoubtedly make an heretical  
" religion and a fabulous philosophy." And again,  
" As to seek Divinity in Philosophy, is as if you  
" would seek the living amongst the dead ; so, on the  
" other hand, to seek Philosophy in Divinity, is all  
" one as to seek the dead amongst the living." Lastly,  
that I may not tire you with quotations, " The  
" prerogative of God comprehends the whole man.  
" Whereby, as we are to *obey God's law*, though we  
" find a reluctance in our *will* ; so we are to *believe*  
" *his word*, though we find a reluctance in our *rea-*  
" *son* : for, if we believe only that which is *agreeable*  
" *unto our reason*, we give assent to the *matter*, not  
" to the *author*, which is no more than we would do  
" towards a discredited witness."

Mighty as is the authority of Lord Bacon, I do not shelter myself under it for the purpose of avoiding the discussion ; but merely in order to show that this great father of the inductive philosophy saw, not only the propriety, but the advantage of subjecting his gigantic intellect to divine instruction. Nor was

this the consequence of affected humility, but of real knowledge of the actual situation of man. He that is shut up in a close place, and can only peep through crevices,—or who stands in a valley and has his prospect intercepted,—or who is encompassed with fogs that render all surrounding objects obscure,—would be overwhelmed with contempt if he set at nought the superior information of those who had beheld the same things from an eminence, and through a translucent atmosphere : yet such is the folly of him who will not adopt what extends beyond his previous knowledge. Beneath omniscience there are innumerable forms of intelligence, in the lowest of which man seems to be placed, but one step above “the beasts that perish :” hence his mind has a pitch beyond which it cannot soar without extraneous aid ; and things clearly intelligible to more noble creatures, moving in a higher sphere, may be dark and inexplicable to him : and shall he despise and deny the truth of facts revealed to him by the Fountain of all Intelligence, because he cannot comprehend them ? Is it not an established axiom, that “that which may be comprehended is less than the hands that grasp it ; that which may be valued is less than the senses which rate it ?”(r) Why then should this axiom be annulled, and any thing be rejected as un-

(r) Tertul. Apel. 17.

true, because it cannot be reduced within the narrow dimensions of a human intellect?

I shall not, however, rest satisfied with this general mode of argumentation: but, since the subject is one in which mistakes are very prevalent, shall descend into particulars, and demonstrate that those who withhold their assent from any of the propositions of Revealed Religion because they are incomprehensible, act upon a principle which, if they adopted in other matters, would lead them to the most unbounded and incurable scepticism. This will be effected if I can show that, in Natural Religion, in many branches of Natural Philosophy, and in several parts of pure and mixed mathematics, there are numerous incontrovertible propositions, which are, notwithstanding, incomprehensible.

Many things are now classed under the irrefragable truths of Natural Religion, which are still far beyond our utmost comprehension. Such are God's necessary subsistence, his production of things from nothing, his ever acting but never changing, his pre-science without necessitation of events, his immensity without extension, his eternity without succession: all of which are evidently out of our mental grasp, because finite minds cannot measure infinite subjects, and because the Supreme Being has not seen fit to communicate to us in our present state the faculty of knowing all things that are intelligible.

Take God's eternity, for example. Suppose a person is disposed to cavil at this great truth, he may ask, "what maxim is less controvertible than this, that nothing can take place without cause?" and again, "what can be more staggering to reason, than that a being should exist without a beginning, without a cause?" If it were replied, that God is the cause of his own existence, it would be only such a multiplication of words as would render the subject still more obscure: for the objector might say, "if you mean this explanation to remove the difficulty, it must imply these palpable and impious absurdities; that the Supreme Being once did not exist, and yet, before he existed, operated to produce his own existence." Here there are great and acknowledged difficulties: yet, commence your reasoning in another direction, and you establish the disputed position notwithstanding. Deduce from your own existence, and that of the universe, the necessity of the existence of a Creator; and you will soon perceive that the argument is direct, and that it necessarily leads you to conclude that a Being *must* have existed for ever, without beginning, and without cause; because, if something have not existed from eternity, the things which now are must have arisen from nothing, and without any producing cause. Yet observe, and this is the point to which I would particularly draw your attention, that though this

train of argumentation firmly establishes the truth in question, it does not remove or diminish one of the difficulties with which it was originally surrounded. You see that it is an irrefragable truth; but you are still incapable of comprehending, much less of elucidating, the mode of the fact. It is obvious, however, and it was for this the example was adduced, that what our reason is incapable of comprehending, and what one train of argument may induce us to reject, another process of reasoning may establish as an indisputable and necessary truth, even while the original difficulties remain undiminished and untouched.

Let us now pass from the truths of Natural Religion to the topics of Natural Philosophy, where you will find, or where indeed you *know*, and only require to be reminded of it, that almost all our knowledge of the universe, its laws, and its phenomena, is but a collection and classification of circumstances of fact, with the consequences resulting from them; some of which lie nearer, and others more remote from view: we may ascertain relations and dependencies, and can often predict what will occur in particular connections; but we know next to nothing of things in themselves, nor can we penetrate into their real, and sometimes not even into their proximate, causes.

Philosophers and chemists have made very extra-

ordinary discoveries respecting the various subjects of their researches, have in many cases determined the laws of their operation, and can frequently predict with perfect confidence what phenomena will occur under certain circumstances. They have demonstrated, for example, that the planetary motions are so regulated, that the squares of the times, in which the planets revolve about the focal luminary, are always proportional to the cubes of their mean distances from that body ;—that electric and magnetic attractions are inversely as the squares of the distances ;—that within certain limits the expansive force of gaseous substances is as the force of compression to which they are subjected ;—that, at certain determinate temperatures, many solids become liquid, and liquids are transformed into aeriform fluids, &c. : and these points are so incontrovertibly established, that no man of competent understanding can possibly refuse his assent to them, though this conviction *must* be yielded previously to his receiving any satisfactory information as to the real nature of the things to which these propositions relate. For, suppose a student were obstinately to suspend his assent till he received satisfactory answers to the following string of queries, it would inevitably follow, that he must remain perpetually ignorant of almost every useful truth in these sciences. What is the cause of the attraction of gravitation, of cohesion,

of electricity, of magnetism, of congelation, of thawing? How are the constituent gases of the atmosphere intermingled? What is caloric? From what does the essential distinction between solids and liquids, and that between liquids and aeriform fluids, arise? In reply to these and a hundred such inquiries, the querist obtains nothing but words in current payment. Suppose, for example, with regard to *evaporation*, he inquires, "how is water taken up "and retained in the atmosphere?" It cannot be in the state of vapour, it is said, because the pressure is too great: there must, therefore, be a true chemical solution. But when we consider that the surface of water is subject to a pressure equal to that of 30 inches of mercury, and that, besides this pressure, there is a sensible affinity between the particles of water themselves; how does the insensible ~~affinity~~ <sup>attraction</sup> of the atmosphere for water overcome both these powers? How does vapour, which ascends with an elastic force of only half an inch of mercury, detach itself from water, when it has the weight of 30 inches of mercury to oppose its ascent? This difficulty applies nearly the same to all theories of the solution of water in air; and it is therefore of consequence for every one, let him adopt what opinion he may, to remove it. Chemical solution but very ill explains it; and, indeed, the best chemical philosophers acknowledge that they have not, as yet, any theory of

evaporation which is even plausible : evaporation is then, at present; *incomprehensible*; yet no man in his senses attempts to deny that evaporation is perpetually taking place.

Allow me next to proceed to a branch of knowledge in which opinions and theories are not daily fluctuating, as are those in chemistry, I mean the mixed mathematical science of MECHANICS. This science is conversant about *force*, *matter*, *time*, *motion*, *space*. Each of these has been the cause of the most elaborate disquisitions, and of the most violent disputes. Let it be asked, what is *force*? If the answerer be candid his reply will be "I cannot tell, so as to satisfy every inquirer, or so as to enter into the essence of the thing." Again, what is *matter*? "I cannot tell." What is *time*? "I cannot tell." What is *motion*? "I cannot tell?" What is *space*? "I cannot tell." Here, then, is a science, the professed object of which is to determine the mutual relations, dependencies, and changes of quantities, with the real nature of all of which we are unacquainted ; and in which the professed object is, notwithstanding, effected. We have certain knowledge respecting subjects of which in themselves we have no knowledge ;—demonstrated, irrefragable propositions, respecting the *relations* of things, which in themselves elude the most acute investigations. The reason of this I shall attempt to assign, by and

by. But before I proceed farther, I must request that you will acquit me of any intention to depreciate the sciences : on the contrary, they furnish me with daily delight ; I know their value, and am in some measure, I hope, able to appreciate their utility. I am also happy to affirm that in the physical sciences, and especially that to which our attention is now directed, very much has been accomplished. Yet I may challenge the wisest philosopher to demonstrate, from unexceptionable principles, and by just argument, what will be the effect of one particle of matter in motion, meeting with another at rest, on the supposition that these two particles constituted all the *matter* in the universe. The fact of the communication of motion from one body to another is as inexplicable as the communication of divine influences. How, then, can the former be admitted with any face, while the latter is denied solely on the ground of its incomprehensibility ? We know nothing of *force* any more than we do of *grace*, except by their effects. There are questions, doubts, perplexities, disputes, diversities of opinion, about the one as well as about the other. Ought we not, therefore, by a parity of reason to conclude, that there may be several true and highly useful propositions about the latter as well as about the former ? Nay, I will venture to go farther, and affirm, that the preponderance of argument is in favour of the

propositions of the theologian. For, while force, time, motion, &c. are avowedly constituent parts of a demonstrable science, and ought, therefore, to be presented in a full blaze of light, the obscure parts proposed for our assent in the Scriptures are *avowedly* mysterious. They are not exhibited to be perfectly understood, but to be believed. They *cannot* be explained without ceasing to be what they are: for the explanation of a mystery is, as Dr. Young has long ago remarked, its destruction. They cannot be rendered obvious without being made mean: for a clear idea is only another name for a *little* idea. Obscurities, however, are felt as incumbrances to any system of philosophy; while mysteries are ornaments of the Christian system, and tests of the humility and faith of its votaries. So that, if the rejectors of incomprehensibles acted consistently with their own principles, they should rather throw aside all philosophical theories in which obscurities are found, and exist as *defects*, than the system of Revealed Religion, in which they enter as essential parts of "that *mystery* of godliness" in which the Apostles gloried.

But perhaps I may be told that although things which are incomprehensible occur in our physical and mixed inquiries, they have no place in "*pure*" mathematics, where all is not only demonstrable, "*but intelligible*." This, again, is an assertion

which I cannot admit; and for the denial of which I shall beg leave to produce my reasons, as this will I apprehend make still more in favour of my general argument. Now, here it is known geometers can demonstrate that there are curves which approach continually to some fixed right-line, without the possibility of ever meeting it. Such, for example, are hyperbolas, which continually approach towards their asymptotes, but cannot possibly meet them, unless an assignable finite space can become equal to nothing. Such, again, are conchoids, which continually approach to their directrices, yet can never meet them, unless a certain point can be both beyond and in contact with a given line at the same moment. Mathematicians can also demonstrate that an infinite space may, by its rotation, generate a solid of finite capacity; as is the case with the solid, formed by the rotation of a Logarithmic curve of infinite length upon its axis, or that formed by the rotation of an Apollonian hyperbola upon its asymptote. They can also show in numerous instances that a variable space shall be continually augmenting, and yet never become equal to a certain finite quantity: and they frequently make transformations with great facility and neatness, by means of expressions to which no definite ideas can be attached. Can we, for example, obtain any clear comprehension, or indeed any notion at all, of the value of a power

whose exponent is an *acknowledged* imaginary quantity, as  $x\sqrt{-1}$ ? Can we, in like manner, obtain any distinct idea of a series constituted of an *infinite* number of terms? In each case the answer, I am convinced, must be in the negative. Yet the science, in which these and numerous other *incomprehensibles* occur, is called *Mathesis, THE DISCIPLINE*, because of its incomparable superiority to other studies in evidence and certainty, and, therefore, its singular adaptation to discipline the mind. And this, notwithstanding these *mysteries* (for are they not such?) is the science, says the eloquent and profound Dr. Barrow, “ which effectually exercises, not vainly “ deludes, nor vexatiously torments, studious minds “ with obscure subtleties, perplexed difficulties, or “ contentious disquisitions ; which overcomes without “ opposition, triumphs without pomp, compels with-“ out force, and rules absolutely without any loss of “ liberty ; which does not privately overreach a weak “ faith, but openly assaults an armed reason, obtains “ a total victory, and puts on inevitable chains.” How does it happen, now, that when the investigation is bent towards objects which cannot be comprehended, the mind arrives at that in which it acquiesces as *certainly*, and rests satisfied? It is not, manifestly, because we have a distinct perception of the *nature* of the objects of the inquiry (for that is precluded by the supposition, and, indeed, by the

preceding statement); but because we *have* such a distinct perception of the *relation* those objects bear one toward another, and can assign positively, without danger of error, the exact relation as to identity or diversity of the quantities before us, at every step of the process. Mathematics is not the science which enables us to ascertain the nature of things in themselves;—for that, alas! is not a science which can be learned in our present imperfect condition, where we see “through a glass darkly;”—but the science of quantity as measurable, that is, as *comparable*: and it is obvious, that we can compare quantities satisfactorily in some respects, while we know nothing of them in others. Thus, we can demonstrate, that any two sides of a plane triangle are, together, greater than the third, by showing that angles, of whose absolute magnitude we *know nothing*, are one greater than the other; and then inferring the truth of the proposition, from the previously demonstrated proposition, that the greater angle in a triangle is subtended by the greater side. Again, we cannot possibly *know ALL* the terms of the infinite series

$$\frac{1}{a} - \frac{c}{a^2} + \frac{c^2}{a^3} - \frac{c^3}{a^4} + \frac{c^4}{a^5} - , \text{ &c. in infin.}$$

because such knowledge implies a contradiction: neither can we know all the terms of the infinite series

$$\frac{1}{c} - \frac{a}{c^2} + \frac{a^2}{c^3} - \frac{a^3}{c^4} + \frac{a^4}{c^5} - , \text{ &c.}$$

yet we can show that these series are equal. For we can demonstrate that the first series is an expanded function, standing with the quantity  $\frac{1}{a+c}$  in the relation of equality: we can likewise demonstrate, that the second series bears the relation of equality with the quantity  $\frac{1}{c+a}$ : and although we can have but a vague idea even of the quantities  $\frac{1}{c+a}$  and  $\frac{1}{a+c}$ , while  $a$  and  $c$  stand as general representatives of *any* quantities; yet those fractions must necessarily be equal, and thence we infer the like equality between the sums of the two infinite series. In a similar manner, we can have no clear conception of the nature of the quantities  $\sqrt{-a}$ ,  $\sqrt{-b}$ , &c.; yet we are as certain that  $\sqrt{-a} = \sqrt{-b} \times \sqrt{\frac{a}{b}}$ , as that  $20 + 30 = 50$ ; since we can demonstrate that equality subsists in the former expression as completely as we can in the latter, both being referable to an intuitive truth. Every mathematician can demonstrate strictly that the conclusions he obtains by means of these quantities, though he cannot comprehend them in themselves, must *necessarily* be true: he therefore acts wisely when he uses them, since they facilitate his inquiries; and knowing that

their relations are *real*, he is satisfied, because it is only in those *relations* that he is interested.

To you, my friend, who are so conversant with mathematical subjects, this enumeration of particulars would be perfectly unnecessary, were it not in order to recommend that similar principles to those which I have here traced be adopted, when *religious* topics are under investigation. We cannot comprehend the nature of an infinite series, so far as that nature depends upon an acquaintance with each term; but we *know* the relation which subsists between it and the radix from which it is expanded: we cannot comprehend the nature of the impossible quantities  $\sqrt{-a}$ ,  $\sqrt{-b}$ , &c.; but we *know* their relation to one another, and to other algebraic quantities. In like manner (though I should scarcely presume to state such a comparison, but for the important practical inference which it furnishes), we cannot, with our limited faculties, comprehend the infinite perfections of the Supreme Being, or reconcile his different attributes, so as to see distinctly how “mercy and peace are met together, righteousness and truth have embraced each other;” or how the Majestic Governor of the universe can be every where present, yet not exclude other beings; but we know, or at least *may* know (if we do not despise and reject the information graciously vouchsafed to us by the God of truth), his relation to us,

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as *our* Father, *our* Guide, and *our* Judge.—We cannot comprehend the nature of the Messiah, as revealed to us in his twofold character of “the Son of God,” and the “Man Christ Jesus;” but we know the relation in which he stands to us as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and as he “who was wounded for *our* transgressions, who was bruised for *our* iniquities, and by whose stripes *we* are “healed:”—Again, we cannot comprehend, perhaps, why the introduction of moral evil should be permitted by him “who hateth iniquity;” but we know, in relation to ourselves, that he hath provided a way for *our* escape from the punishment due to sin (which way if we lose, the fault is entirely our own),—and therefore, though we cannot comprehend and explain it so as to silence all cavillers, yet we have abundant reason to “glory in the *mystery* of Reconciliation.” By pursuing this current of reflection farther, and running over the general principles of other branches of mathematical, chemical, and metaphysical science, than I have here adverted to, you will still find, I am persuaded, that the result of the inquiry will come in aid of our religious belief, by showing that the difficulties attending Christianity are of the same kind (and probably should be referred to the same cause, the weakness of our faculties), as those which envelope all the fundamental principles of knowledge.

Philosophers, notwithstanding all these difficulties, recommend the cultivation and diffusion of the sciences, because of their tendency to sharpen the intellectual faculties of man, and to meliorate his condition in society. With how much greater reason and earnestness, then, should Christians recommend the dissemination and adoption of "pure and " undefiled religion," considering its direct tendency to enlarge the understanding, and yet fill it with the contemplation of Deity, to purify and harmonise the passions, to refine the moral sense, to qualify and strengthen for every function in life, to sustain under the pressure of affliction, to afford consolation in sickness, and enable us to triumph in death ! What other science can make even a pretension to dethrone oppression, to abolish slavery, to exclude war, to extirpate fraud, to banish violence, to revive the withered blossoms of Paradise ? Such are the pretensions and the blessings of Genuine Christianity ; and wherever Genuine Christianity prevails, there are they experienced. Thus it accomplishes its promises on earth, where alone it has enemies ; it will therefore accomplish them in Heaven, where its friends reign. Here, indeed, its advocate must be reduced to silence ; for how shall he display the meaning of its *celestial* promises ! how describe dignity so vast, or picture glory so brilliant ! How shall language delineate what mind cannot imagine ! and

where is that mind, among puny and ephemeral creatures, that can penetrate the thick obscure, that can describe the light of Perfect Knowledge, that can feel the glow of Perfect Love, that can breathe the air of Perfect Happiness?

Let it not, however, be forgotten, that though some of the truths revealed in Scripture are mysterious, and the “ eternal weight of glory” it promises too vast for us to estimate; yet the tendency of the most exalted of its mysteries, and the most exquisite of its promises, is *practical*. If we cannot explain the influences of the Spirit, for example, happy will it be for us, nevertheless, if we *experience*, that “the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” If we cannot comprehend all that we read in the Sacred Pages, let us, notwithstanding, submit, adore, and profit by them; recollecting, that “the sublimest truths, and the profoundest mysteries of religion, are as level, perhaps, to the capacities of the meanest as of the highest human intellect. By neither are they to be fully fathomed. By both they may be easily BELIEVED, on the sure testimony of Divine Revelation. As simple and important facts which connect time with eternity, and heaven with earth, they belong equally to men of every order, and are directly calculated to produce those emotions of awe and

“ reverence, of faith and hope, and reliance on the  
“ Divine presence, providence, justice, and benevo-  
“ lence, of which the consequences must be in the  
“ highest degree MORAL.” (t)

Believe me, &c.

(t) Edinburgh Review, vol. xvii. p. 260.

## LETTER V.

*On the Genuineness and Authenticity of the  
Scriptures.*

HAVING endeavoured, in my preceding letters, to point out the absurdity of deism,—the necessity of Revelation, especially as manifested by the defectiveness of all the discoveries of the ancient philosophers in respect of morals and theology,—and to show that mysterious and incomprehensible things occur in every branch of knowledge; I shall now proceed to an examination of that collection of writings which the majority of Christians in all ages have considered as coming from God, and revered as constituting that system of Revealed Religion by which our conduct should be regulated, and on which should be founded our hopes and fears of “future bliss or future woe.”

The Bible is not to be contemplated as one book, but as a collection of several, composed at different times, by different persons, and in different places. It is a collection of writings, partly historical, partly prophetical, partly didactic, composed some previously, some subsequently, to an important event, adverted to in most of them, called “*the coming of*

"*the Messiah* :" an event which is generally described as having a remarkable tendency to enhance the glory of God, and the happiness of man. Now, to believe the Christian Religion is to believe that Moses and the Prophets, Christ and his Apostles, were what they were described to be in these books ; that is, were endued with divine authority, that they had a commission from God to act and teach as they did, and that He will verify their declarations concerning future things, and especially those concerning a *future life*, by the event ;—it is to receive the Scriptures as our rule of life, as the foundation of our hopes and fears. Such a belief, that it may be operative, must have a substantial basis : and so varied and persuasive are the evidences of Christianity, that every man, whether his intellectual faculties are weak or strong, have been little or much cultivated, may obtain evidence suited to his circumstances. He who cannot enter into elaborate disquisitions concerning the credibility of the Scriptures, has other and often stronger grounds of faith. He may see the provision which the Bible makes for the restoration of man to happiness to be precisely such as his own necessities require : he may see that the purity of its commands has a wonderful tendency to elevate the nature of man, and to produce universal felicity ; he may experience that actual change of heart and life which the gospel promises to all

sincere believers; and then, as the Apostle expresses it, "He that believeth on the Son of God, " hath the witness in *himself*,"(v) a witness that may grow and triumph under the decay of the mental faculties, the anguish of a sick-bed, and the agonies of death. But the evidence of which I now intend principally to speak, is that deducible from a more critical examination of the Bible itself, and from collateral testimony drawn from historic and other indisputable sources.

Now any candid and reflecting person, when he first directs his attention to this wonderful volume, and notices the awful, authoritative, and momentous language which is often assumed in it, will be naturally impelled to inquire, Is this book what it professes to be, the Word of God? Were its various authors instructed by God to relate the histories, state the doctrines, enforce the precepts, predict the events, which are the subjects of their respective books? Were they " holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," or were they impostors? Or, to reduce these inquiries into a methodical form, it will be asked generally, Are the Books of the Old and New Testament (excluding those which are avowedly apocryphal) *genuine*? Are they *authentic*? Are they *inspired*? Here nothing is

(v) 1 John, v. 10.

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asked that is tautologous, nothing that is superfluous. For a book may be genuine that is not authentic: a book may be authentic that is not genuine: and many are both genuine and authentic which are not inspired. The history of Sir Charles Grandison, for example, is genuine, being indeed written by Richardson, the author whose name it bears; but it is not authentic, being a mere effort of that ingenious writer's invention in the production of fictions. The account of Lord Anson's Voyages, again, is an authentic book, the information being supplied by Lord Anson himself to the author; but it is not genuine, for the real author was Benjamin Robins, the mathematician, and not Walters, whose name is appended to it. Hayley's Memoirs of the Life of Cowper, are both genuine and authentic; they were written by Mr. Hayley, and the information they contain was deduced from the best authority. The same may be said of many other works, which, notwithstanding, lay no claims to the character of being inspired. These three characteristics of genuineness, authenticity, and inspiration, meet no where but in the books which constitute the Old and New Testament. In order to establish this position, I shall now attend to the qualities of genuineness and authenticity, which will furnish ample employment for the present letter; and shall consider that of inspiration in a subsequent part of the series.

Here I shall first present you with three general propositions on the genuineness of Scripture, taken principally from an ingenious philosopher of the last century; (*w*) and then subjoin some such particular considerations as must, I think, in conjunction with those propositions, remove all doubt from every candid mind.

*L. The Genuineness of the Scriptures proves the Truth of the principal Facts contained in them.*

For, First, it is very rare to meet with any genuine writings professing to be real history, in which the principal facts are not true; unless where both the motives which engaged the author to falsify, and the circumstances which gave some plausibility to the fiction, are apparent; neither of which can be alleged in the present case with any colour of reason. Where the writer of a history appears to the world as such, not only his moral sense, but his regard to his character and his interest, are strong motives not to falsify in notorious matters: he must, therefore, have stronger motives from the opposite quarter, and also a favourable conjuncture of circumstances before he can attempt this.

Secondly. As this is rare in general, so it is much more rare where the writer treats of things which happened in his own time, and under his own cog-

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nizance or direction, and communicates his history to persons under the same circumstances. All which may be said of the writers of the Scripture History.

That this and the following arguments may be applied with more ease and perspicuity, I shall here, in one view, refer the books of the Old and New Testaments to their proper authors. It is assumed, then, that the PENTATEUCH consists of the writings of *Moses*, put together by *Samuel*, with a very few additions; that the books of *JOSHUA* and *JUDGES* were, in like manner, collected by him; and the book of *RUTH*, with the first part of the book of *SAMUEL*, written by him; that the latter part of the first book of *SAMUEL*, and the second book, were written by the prophets who succeeded *Samuel*, probably *Nathan* and *Gad*; that the books of *KINGS* and *CHRONICLES* are extracts from the records of the succeeding prophets concerning their own times, and from the public genealogical tables, made by *Ezra*; that the books of *EZRA* and *NEHEMIAH* are collections of like records, some written by *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, and some by their predecessors; that the book of *ESTHER* was written by some eminent Jew, in or near the times of the transactions there recorded, perhaps *Mordecai*,—though some conjecture it was *Ezra*; the book of *JOB* by a Jew, probably by *Moses*; the *PSALMS* by *David*, *Asaph*, *Moses*, and other pious persons; the books of *Pro-*

VERBS and the CANTICLES by Solomon; the book of ECCLESIASTES by *Solomon*, towards the close of his life, when distress and anguish had reclaimed him from idolatry; the PROPHECIES by the prophets whose names they bear; and the books of the NEW TESTAMENT by the persons to whom they are usually ascribed. There are many internal evidences, and, in the case of the New Testament, many external ones too (which will be touched upon as we proceed), by which these books may be shown to belong to the authors here specified. Or, if there be any doubts, they are merely of a critical nature, and do not at all affect the *authenticity* of the books, nor materially alter the application of the arguments in favour of this proposition. Thus, if the Epistle to the HEBREWS be supposed written not by St. Paul, but by Clement, or Barnabas, or Luke, the evidence therein given to the miracles performed by Christ and his followers, will not be at all invalidated by this circumstance.

Thirdly. The great importance of the facts mentioned in the Scriptures makes it still more improbable that the several authors should either have attempted to falsify, or have succeeded in such an attempt. This, indeed, is an argument for the truth of the facts, which proves the genuineness of the books at the same time. The truth of the facts, however, is inferred more directly from their im-

portance, if the genuineness of the Scriptures be previously allowed. The same thing may be observed of the great number of particular circumstances of time, place, persons, &c. mentioned in the Scriptures, and of the harmony of the books with themselves, and with each other. These are arguments both for the genuineness of the books, and the truth of the facts distinctly considered, and also arguments for deducing the truth from the genuineness. And indeed the arguments for the general truth of the history of any age or nation, where regular records have been kept, are so interwoven together, and support each other in such a variety of ways, that it is extremely difficult to keep the ideas of them distinct, so as not to anticipate, and not to prove, more than the exactness of logical method requires one to prove. Or, in other words, the inconsistency of the contrary supposition is so great, that they can scarcely stand long enough to be confuted. You may easily try this upon the history of England, or France, Rome, or Greece.

Fourthly. If the books of the Old and New Testament were written by the persons to whom they are inscribed above, i. e. if they be genuine, the moral characters of these writers afford the strongest assurance that the facts asserted by them are true. Falsehoods and frauds of a *common* nature shock the moral sense of common men, and are rarely met with,

except in persons of abandoned characters : how inconsistent, then, must those of the most glaring and impious nature be with the highest moral characters ! That such characters are due to the sacred writers appears from the writings themselves, by an internal evidence ; but there is also strong *external* evidence in many cases ; and indeed this point is allowed in general by unbelievers. The sufferings which several of the writers underwent both in life and death, in attestation of *the facts* delivered by them, is a particular argument in favour of these.

Fifthly. The arguments here alleged for proving the truth of the Scripture History from the genuineness of the books, are as conclusive in respect of the miraculous facts, as of the common ones. But besides this it may be observed, that if we allow the genuineness of the books to be a sufficient evidence of the common facts mentioned in them, the miraculous facts must be allowed also, from their close connection with the common ones. It is necessary to admit both or neither. It is not, for instance, to be conceived, that Moses should have delivered the Israelites from ~~their~~ slavery in Egypt, or conducted them through the wilderness for forty years, at all, in such manner as the common history represents, unless we suppose the miraculous facts intermixed with it be true also. In like manner, the fame of Christ's miracles, the multitudes which followed

him, the adherence of his disciples, the jealousy and hatred of the chief priests, scribes, and pharisees, with many other facts of a common nature, are impossible to be accounted for, unless we allow that he did really work miracles. And similar observations apply in general to the other parts of the scripture history.

Sixthly. There is even a particular argument in favour of the miraculous part of the scripture history, to be drawn from the reluctance of mankind to receive miraculous facts. It is true that this reluctance is greater in some ages and nations than in others, and probable reasons may be assigned why this reluctance was, in general, less in ancient times than in the present (which, however, are presumptions that some *real* miracles were then wrought); but it must always be considerable from the very frame of the human mind, and would be particularly so amongst the Jews at the time of Christ's appearance, as they had then (according to their own account) been without miracles for at least four hundred years. Now this reluctance must make both the writers and readers very much upon their guard; and if it be now one of the chief prejudices against revealed religion, as unbelievers unanimously assert, it is but reasonable to allow also, that it would be a strong check upon the publication of a miraculous history at or near the time when the

miracles were said to be performed, i. e. it will be a strong confirmation of such a history, if its genuineness be granted previously.

And, upon the whole, we may conclude certainly, that the principal facts, both common and miraculous, mentioned in the Scriptures, must be true, if their genuineness be allowed. But the particular evidences of miraculous facts, as well as the principal objections which have been urged against them, will be stated more fully in a future letter.

The converse of this proposition is also true, namely, *if the principal facts mentioned in the Scriptures be true, they must be genuine writings*. This converse proposition is much more important than it may appear at first sight; for there are many evidences for the truth of particular facts mentioned in the scriptures, such, for example, as those taken from natural history, from geography, and the contemporary profane history, which no way presuppose, but, on the contrary, *prove*, the genuineness of the Scriptures; and this genuineness, thus proved, may, by the arguments alleged under this proposition, be extended to infer the authenticity of the rest of the facts. Nor is this to argue in a circle, and to prove the truth of the Scripture history from its truth; but to prove the truth of those facts, which are not attested by natural or civil history, from those which,

are, by the medium of the genuineness of the Scriptures.

*II. The Language, Style, and Manner of Writing, used in the Books of the Old and New Testaments, are Arguments of their Genuineness.*

Here, let it be observed, First, That the Hebrew language, in which the Old Testament was written, being the language of an ancient people, and one that had little intercourse with their neighbours, and whose neighbours also spake a language that had great affinity with their own, would not change so rapidly as modern languages have done, since nations have been variously mixed with one another, and commerce, arts, and sciences, greatly extended. Yet some changes there necessarily must be in about 1054 years elapsing between the time of Moses and that of Malachi. And accordingly critical Hebrew scholars assure us, that the Biblical Hebrew corresponds to this criterion with so much exactness, that a considerable argument may thence be deduced in favour of the genuineness of the books of the Old Testament.

Secondly. The books of the Old Testament have too considerable a diversity of style to be the work either of one Jew (for a Jew he must be, on account of the language), or of any set of contemporary Jews. If, therefore, they be all forgeries, there must be a succession of impostors in different ages, who have

concurred to impose upon posterity, which is inconceivable. To suppose part forged, and part genuine, is very harsh; neither would this supposition, if admitted, be satisfactory.

Thirdly. The Hebrew language ceased to be spoken, as a living language, soon after the time of the Babylonish captivity; but it would be difficult or impossible to forge any thing in it after it was become a dead language. For learned men affirm positively, that there was no *grammar* made for the Hebrew till many ages after; and, as it is difficult to write in a dead language with exactness, even by the help of a grammar, so it seems impossible without it. All the books of the Old Testament must therefore be, at least, *nearly* as ancient as the Babylonish captivity; and since they could not *all* be written in the same age (for the reason just assigned), some must be considerably more ancient; which would bring us again to a *succession* of conspiring impostors.

Fourthly. This last remark may perhaps afford a new argument for the genuineness of the book of Daniel, if any were wanting. But, indeed, the *Septuagint* translation, executed about 287 years before the Christian æra, shows not only this, but all the other books of the Old Testament, to have been considered as ancient and genuine books soon after the times of Antiochus Epiphanes, at least.

Fifthly. There is a simplicity of style, and an unaffected manner of writing, in all the books of the Old Testament (excepting only those parts that are avowedly poetical or prophetical), which is a very strong evidence of their genuineness, even exclusively, of the suitableness of this circumstance to the times of the supposed authors.

Sixthly. The style of the New Testament also is remarkably simple and unaffected, and perfectly suited to the time, places, and persons. Let it be observed, that the use of words and phrases is such, as well as the ideas and method of reasoning, that the books of the New Testament could be written by none but persons originally *Jews*, which would bring the inquiry into a still narrower compass : for I believe it would be impossible to devise any hypothesis which would satisfactorily account for *Jews* telling such a story, and sacrificing their lives in attestation of it, unless the death and resurrection of Christ make an essential part of that hypothesis.

It may also be observed, that the narrations and precepts of both Old and New Testaments are delivered without marks of hesitation ; the writers teach as having authority ; a circumstance peculiar to those who have both a clear knowledge of what they deliver, and a perfect integrity of heart.

And farther, that the care used in specifying that some of the Psalms were composed by Asaph, others

by Moses, some of the Proverbs by Lemuel, &c. furnishes another argument in favour of the genuineness of the books of Scripture, and leads us to infer that those books are the real productions of the authors to whom they are inscribed.

III. *The very great number of particular circumstances of Time, Place, Persons, &c. mentioned in the Scriptures, come in proof both of their Genuineness and Authenticity.*

Here I shall recite some of the principal heads under which these circumstances may be found. Thus there are mentioned in the book of GENESIS, the rivers of Paradise, the generations of the antediluvian patriarchs, the deluge with its circumstances, the place where the ark rested, the building of the tower of Babel, the confusion of tongues, the dispersion of mankind, or the *division* of the earth amongst the posterity of Shem, Ham, and Japhet, the generations of the postdiluvian patriarchs, with the gradual shortening of human life after the flood; the sojournings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with many particulars of the state of Canaan, and the neighbouring countries in their times, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the state of the land of Edom both before and after Esau's time, and the descent of Jacob into Egypt, with the state of Egypt before Moses's time.

In the book of EXODUS are mentioned the plagues

of Egypt, the institution of the passover, the passage through the Red Sea, with the destruction of Pharaoh and his host there, the miracle of manna, the victory over the Amalekites, the solemn delivery of the *law* from Mount Sinai, many particular laws both moral and ceremonial, the worship of the golden calf, and a very minute description of the tabernacle, priests, garments, ark, &c.

In **LEVITICUS** there is a collection of ceremonial laws, with all their particularities, and an account of the remarkable deaths of Nadab and Abihu.

The book of **NUMBERS** contains the first and second numberings of the several tribes, with their genealogies, the peculiar offices of the three several families of the Levites, many ceremonial laws, the journeyings and encampments of the people in the wilderness during forty years, with the relation of some remarkable events which happened in this period; such as the searching of the land, the rebellion of Korah, the victories over Arad, Sihon, and Og, with the division of the kingdoms of the two last among the Gadites, Reubenites, and Manassites, the history of Balak and Balaam, and the victory over the Midianites; all described with the several particularities of time, place, and persons.

The book of **DEUTERONOMY** contains a recapitulation of many things contained in the last three books, with a second delivery of the *law*, chiefly the

moral one, by Moses, upon the borders of Canaan, just before his death, with an account of that death, and the true reason assigned why he saw, but did not enter, the promised land.

In the book of JOSHUA are related, the passage over Jordan, the conquest of the land of Canaan in detail, and the division of it among the tribes; including a minute geographical description.

The book of JUDGES contains a recital of a great variety of public transactions, with the private origin of some. In all, the names of times, places, and persons, both among the Israelites, and the neighbouring nations, are noted with particularity and simplicity.

In the book of RUTH is a very particular account of the genealogy of David, with several incidental circumstances.

The books of SAMUEL, KINGS, CHRONICLES, EZRA, and NEHEMIAH, contain the transactions of the kings before the Captivity, and of the governors afterwards, all delivered in the same circumstantial manner. And here the particular account of the regulations, sacred and civil, established by David, and of the building of the temple by Solomon, the genealogies given in the beginning of the first book of *Chronicles*, and the lists of the persons who returned, sealed, &c. after the captivity, in the books of *Ezra*

and *Nehemiah*, deserve particular notice, in the light in which we are now considering things.

The book of **ESTHER** contains a like account of a very remarkable event, with *the institution of a festival in memory of it*.

The book of **PSALMS** mentions *many* historical events, both common and miraculous, in an incidental way, or sometimes by way of celebration ; (*x*) and this, as well as the books of **JOB**, **PROVERBS**, **ECCLESIASTES**, and **CANTICLES**, allude to the manners and customs of ancient times, in various manners.

In the **PROPHECIES** there are blended some historical relations; and in the other parts the indirect mention of facts, times, places, and persons, is interwoven, with the predictions in the most copious and circumstantial manner.

If we turn to the **NEW TESTAMENT**, the same observations present themselves at first view. Here, also, there are often comprehensive syllabuses of the leading facts in the Old-Testament-history comprised in a single chapter, of which those mentioned at the foot of the page are striking instances. (*y*) It is also observable, that Jesus Christ, in his various conversations with the Jews, assumes the genuineness and authenticity of the Jewish Scriptures, that is, of

(*x*) See especially Psalms 105, 106, 114, 135, 136, &c.

(*y*) Acts vii. 1 Corinthians x. Hebrews xi. 2 Peter ii.

the Old Testament books, and argues upon them. Thus we find him speaking of Moses as a lawgiver, referring to the decalogue, and various laws and observances mentioned in different parts of the Pentateuch, to Abraham, to Jacob, to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, to the Queen of Sheba, (mentioned in 1 Kings x.) and Solomon, to David as a prophet, and as *inspired*, to "Moses and the prophets" generally, to Jonah as a type of himself, and to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, and Malachi, as prophets. In the several parts of the New Testament, too, we have the names of friends and enemies, the conduct of both, the faults of friends told without gloss, those of enemies without virulence; the names of Jews, Greeks, and Romans, obscure and illustrious; the times, places, and circumstances of facts specified directly, and alluded to indirectly, with various references to the customs and manners of those times and places. And here, again, we may notice, by the bye, that many of the historical books, both of the Old and New Testament, contain *prophecies* which have been fulfilled; and from which both their truth and their divine authority may be inferred, as I shall show in my next letter.

Now, from the preceding enumeration it may be observed, First, that in fact we never find forged or false accounts of things to superabound thus in par-

particularities. There is always some truth where considerable particularities are related, and they always seem to bear some proportion to one another. Thus there is a great want of the particulars of time, place, and persons, in Manetho's account of the Egyptian dynasties, Ctesias's account of the Assyrian kings, and those which the technical chronologers have given of the ancient kingdoms of Greece; and, agreeably to this obvious principle, these accounts have much fiction and falsehood, with some truth. Whereas, Thucydides's history of the Peloponnesian war, and Cæsar's of the war in Gaul, in both which the particulars of time, place, and persons, are mentioned, are universally esteemed authentic to a great degree of exactness.

Secondly. A forger, or a relater of known falsehoods, would be careful not to mention so great a number of particulars, since this would be to put into his reader's hands criteria by which he may be detected. Hence appears one reason of the fact mentioned in the last paragraph, and which, in confirming that fact, confirms the proposition here to be established.

Thirdly. A forger, or a relater of falsehoods, could scarcely furnish out such lists of particulars. It is easy to conceive how faithful records, kept, from time to time, by persons concerned in the transactions, should contain such lists; nay, it is natural to-

expect them, in this case, from that local memory which takes strong possession of the fancy in those who have been present at transactions: but it would be a work of the highest invention, and greatest stretch of genius, to raise from nothing such numberless particularities, as are almost every where to be met with in the Scriptures.

There is, besides, a circumstance relating to the Gospels, which deserves particular notice in this place. St. *Matthew* and St. *John* were apostles; and therefore, since they accompanied Christ, must have this local memory of his journeyings and miracles. St. *Mark* was a Jew of Judea, and a friend of St. *Peter's*; and therefore may either have had this local memory himself, or have written chiefly from St. *Peter*, who had. But St. *Luke*, being a proselyte of Antioch, not converted perhaps till several years after Christ's resurrection, and receiving his accounts from different eye-witnesses, as he says himself, could have no regard to that order of time which a local memory would suggest. Let us try, now, how the gospels answer to these positions. Matthew's, then, appears to be in exact order of time, and to be a regulator to Mark's and Luke's, showing Mark's to be nearly so, but Luke's to have little or no regard to the order of time in his account of Christ's ministry. John's gospel is like Matthew's, in order of time; but as he wrote after all the other

evangelists, and with a view only of recording some remarkable particulars, such as Christ's actions before he left Judea to go to preach in Galilee, his disputes with the Jews of Jerusalem, and his discourses to the apostles at his last supper, there was less opportunity for this evangelist's local memory to show itself. However, his recording what passed before Christ's going into Galilee might be *in part* from this cause; as Matthew's omission of it was probably from his want of this local memory. For it appears that Matthew resided in Galilee, and that he was not converted till some time after Christ's going thither to preach. Now this suitableness of the four gospels to their reputed authors, in a circumstance of so subtle and recluse a nature, is quite inconsistent with the supposition of fiction or forgery. This remark is originally due to Sir Isaac Newton. (z)

Fourthly. If we could suppose the persons who forged the books of the Old and New Testaments to have furnished their readers with the great variety of particulars mentioned above, notwithstanding the two reasons here alleged against it, we cannot, however, conceive, but that the persons of those times, when the books were published, must, by the help of these criteria, have detected and exposed the forgeries or

(z) See his chapter on the birth and passion of Christ, in his Comment on Daniel.

falsehoods. For these criteria are so attested by allowed facts, as at this time, and in these remote parts of the world, to establish the authenticity and genuineness of the Scriptures ; and, by parity of reason, they would suffice even now to detect the fraud, were there any : whence we may conclude, *a fortiori*, that they must have enabled the persons who were upon the spot, when the books were first circulated, to do this ; and the importance of many of the particulars recorded, many of the renunciations required, would furnish them with abundant motives for this purpose. So that upon the whole it may be safely inferred, that the very great number of particulars of time, place, persons, &c. mentioned in the Scriptures, is a proof of their genuineness and truth ; even independently of the consideration of the agreement of these particulars with history, natural and civil, and the agreement of the several books with themselves and with one another.

Were I to rest the proof of the genuineness and authenticity of the Scriptures solely upon what has been already advanced in this letter, I might safely challenge the most learned men to adduce evidence of any thing like equal weight in proof of the genuineness of Caesar's Commentaries, Pliny's Letters, Livy's Roman History, Tacitus's Annals, or any other pieces preserved to us from antiquity, and received without hesitation by all except madmen. But I am

unwilling to quit a subject so copious and important without going still farther than this, and bringing forward other evidence in favour of particular portions of the Bible, from which their antiquity and genuineness will be placed in the most incontrovertible light. Here, though, that our inquiry may be circumscribed within moderate limits, I must make selections; and shall for the most part speak of those books, the authority of which has been most disputed by unbelievers.

Let us then, for a first example, inquire into particular proofs of the authenticity of the PENTATEUCH. And here the evidences are numerous, various, and striking: I shall select the most prominent. *First*, ancient heathen writers testify to Moses and his writings in some way or other. Thus Manetho, Che-remon, Apollonius, and Lysimachus, testify that Moses was the leader of the Jews, and the writer of their *Law*. Eupolemus, Artapanus, Strabo, Trogus Pompeius, Chalcidius, and Juvenal, speak of Moses as the author of a volume which was preserved with great care among the Jews, by which the worship of images and eating of swine's flesh were forbidden, circumcision and the observation of the Sabbath strictly enjoined. (a) Longinus cites Moses as the Lawgiver of the Jews, and a person of no inconsi-

(a) It will be sufficient to refer to Juv. Sat. xiv. ver. 96—106.

derable character ; and adds, that he has given a noble specimen of the true sublime in his account of the creation of the world, when *light* was called into existence. (b) Diodorus Siculus, in his Catalogue of those lawgivers who affected to have received the plan of their laws from some deity, mentions Moses as ascribing his to that god whom he calls *Jaoth*, or *Jah*. And farther he speaks of Moses as a man illustrious for his courage and prudence, who instituted the Jewish religion and laws, divided the Jews into twelve tribes, established the priesthood among them with a judicial power, &c. (c) Numenius, a Pythagorean, held the Jewish Scriptures, and especially the books of Moses, in such great esteem, that his books of the chief good, &c. are full of passages quoted from Moses and some of the prophets with great reverence. He says, “ *Plato* was only Moses “ speaking *Greek*,” and affirms that Moses, by his prayers, brought dreadful calamities upon Egypt. (d) Justin Martyr enumerates many poets, historians, lawgivers, and philosophers of Greece, who mention Moses as the leader and prince of the Jewish nation. (e) Berossus and Abydenus mention the deluge. Artapanus, Eupolemus, and Abydenus, speak of

(b) Long. de Sublim. § 9, p. 50. Pearce’s 8vo. ed. 1732.

(c) Diod. Sic. ap. Phot. Bib.

(d) Euseb. Prep. Ev. ix. 8. xi. 10. Orig. against Cels. lib. iv.

(e) Just. Cohort. ad Gent. p. 9—11.

the tower of Babel ; and the latter of the failure of that enterprize. Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Tacitus, Pliny, and Solinus, agree in giving an account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the main agreeable to that of Moses. (*f*) Berossus, Alexander Polyhister, and others, make express and honourable mention of Abraham, and some of his family ; and even speak of his interview with Melchisedec.

*Secondly.* The genuineness and authenticity of the books of Moses, may be inferred from their being mentioned in other books of Scripture. Thus, in the book of Joshua, in both the books of Kings, in the second book of Chronicles, in the books of Ezra, of Daniel, of Malachi, the writing of the Law is unequivocally ascribed to Moses. The Divine mission of Moses is attested in the first book of Chronicles, in the Psalms, the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Several of the miraculous facts recorded in these books, suggest to the Prophets their finest images. (*g*) Each of the five books of Moses is

(*f*) Tacit. Hist. l. v. c. vii. Plin. Nat. Hist. Solinus. c. xxxvi.

(*g*) Vide Eden, Ezek. xxviii. 13. The Deluge, Isai. xxiv. 18.—Sodom and Gomorrah, Isai. xxxiv. 9. The Exodus, Isai. xlivi. 16—19. xi. 15, 16, li. 9, 10. Descent on Sinai, Micah i. 3, 4. Acts iii. 22. vii. 35—37. xiii. 39. xxvi. 22. xxviii. 23. Rom. x. 5. 1 Cor. x. 2. 2 Cor. iii. 7—15. Heb. iii. 2. vii. 14. x. 28. Rev. xv. 3. &c.

referred to, or separately quoted, by Christ himself in the Gospels. And after his resurrection, his Apostles add their testimony, not only to the fact that the law was written by Moses, but that it was written under the superintendence of inspiration. (g)

Thirdly. The fact is affirmed in the books themselves. Thus, in Exodus, "Moses wrote all the words of the Lord; and took the book of the Covenant, and read it in the audience of the people." And again, in the book of Deuteronomy, which appears, as Bishop Watson observes, to be a kind of repetition or abridgement of the four preceding books,—"When Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, Moses commanded the Levites which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying—Take this book of the Law, and put it into the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." (h) In conformity with this it was testified full 800 years after, in the 2d book of Kings, and the 2d book of Chronicles: "Hilkiah said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the Law in the House of the Lord." "Hilkiah the priest found a book of the Law of the Lord, given by Moses." (i)

(g) See note (g) in the preceding page.

(h) Exodus xxiv. 4, 7. Deuteron. xxxi. 24--26.

(i) 2 Kings xxii. 8. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14.

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*Fourthly.* Moses in these books gives a detailed account of various miracles openly wrought by himself, and of several miraculous interpositions of God in testimony of his divine mission: practices and ceremonies among the Jews were founded upon those miraculous events. The books of Moses also contain prophecies, as that which declares "that the seed of "the woman shall bruise the serpent's head," and the prophecies of the dying patriarch Jacob. Now the existence of the customs and ceremonies prove the actual occurrence of the miraculous facts, and these establish the fidelity of the writings, and the divine authority under which Moses acted. So likewise the accomplishment of the prophecies prove that they were dictated by God. Had not the miracles taken place, it would be absurd to imagine the books could ever have been received, or the practices we advert to introduced. But the arguments suggested under this head will be enlarged upon in subsequent letters. I now proceed to remark with regard to the books of Moses,

*Lastly,* That their reception among the Jews proves that they were written by Moses, and that what he affirms respecting the divine dictation of greater part of them is true. PAUL says, "Even "unto this day, *when Moses is read*, the veil is upon "their heart,"(k) that is, the Jews are ignorant of

(k) 2 Cor. iii. 15.

the true spiritual meaning of the Mosaic writings. Whence it is evident that, in his time, these writings were read regularly among the Jews, and had long been so. Again, JOSEPHUS, in his book against Appion, says, " We (the Jews) have two-and-twenty " books which are to be believed as of divine authority, and which comprehend the history of all " ages: *five* belong to Moses, which contain the " origin of man, and the tradition of the succession " of generations down to his death; which takes in " a compass of about three thousand years." MAMMONIDES also, in the eleventh century, drew up a confession of faith for the Jews, which all of them at this day admit. Two of its articles relate to Moses: they are, 1. " The doctrine and prophecy of " Moses is true." 2. " The law that we have was " given by Moses." The Jews, then, from the time of Josephus down to the present, have ascribed the Pentateuch to Moses. Assume the hypothesis that these five books were forged *any* time between Moses and Josephus, and mark the great absurdity thereby produced; you must, in consequence, believe that at some one period the whole Jewish nation suffered themselves to be deluded, to adopt burdensome rites in remembrance of events which *they* knew never occurred, and to receive, as the law which was ever after to regulate their conduct, rules contrived by a vile pretender, who endeavoured to palm them upon

them as laws emanating from the Supreme Being himself. This is in itself so extremely preposterous and improbable, that I might safely have rested the authority of the Pentateuch upon the present argument alone, were it not that as this portion of the Bible has been more exposed than any other to infidel attacks, I thought it right to show that, fortified as it is on all points, it may fairly be reckoned impregnable. (l)

I shall now pass to the book of *JOB*, the *authenticity* of which has been more questioned than any of the historical parts of Scripture next to the Pentateuch. The great antiquity of this book, however, has not, as far as I recollect, been much disputed. But it has been made a question, “Is this book “dramatic or narrative?” Or, “Was there ever “such a man as Job?” Now although the Apostle Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, quotes a

(l) Another very strong argument in favour of the authenticity of the Pentateuch is derived from the variety of minute allusions, and indirect coincidences, between the book of Deuteronomy and the preceding books; coincidences, such as would never have been found in forged compositions. This argument has been established upon numerous instances selected by Dr. Graves, of Trinity College, Dublin, in his valuable “Lectures on the Pentateuch.” The genuineness of one of the books, Exodus, may also be inferred from the short and modest account of 80 years of Moses’s life, preceding his Divine Mission, comprised in *twenty-two* verses.

passage from the book of Job with his accustomed reference to a book of Divine Authority, “*For it is written;*” (m) yet this does not determine the point. But the reality of the history, however poetical and elevated the style may be, may I think be fairly inferred from the prophecies of Ezekiel, and the Epistle of James. In the former, God himself, in speaking to the prophet, repeatedly mentions *Job*, in conjunction with *Noah* and *Daniel*, as men of extraordinary righteousness : “ Though these three “ men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they “ should deliver but their own souls by their right-“ eousness, saith the Lord God.” And in the latter, James exhibits the patience of Job, and its reward, as an example and encouragement to professing Christians. (n) These passages prove, satisfactorily, I think, that Job was a real, and not an ideal, character. It is probable this book of Job has greater antiquity than any other in the Old Testament : for it contains no allusion to the children of Israel, to their grievous afflictions in Egypt, or their happy deliverance from them ; though these topics would have given fine scope to Job and his friends in their various conferences. It should seem, indeed, from the age to which Job lived (but little less than 200 years), that he was a contemporary with the ancient

(m) 1 Cor. iii. 19. Job v. 13.

(n) Ezek. xiv. 14. 16. 18. 20. James v. 11.

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Hebrew patriarchs ; and that Uz, his country, was in Edom. The book was most probably written by Moses while he was in the land of Midian, where he had opportunity of coming to the knowledge of this history ; and, seeing that it might be very useful to comfort and direct the Israelites, wrote it under divine superintendence for their benefit. Thus much, at least, is clear ; that the book was written by a Hebrew, by one who had been in Arabia, and by one who wrote before the promulgation of the Mosaic law : these criteria all attach to Moses, and to no other. Besides this, Hebrew scholars affirm that, in the original, the language is often peculiar, the expressions being such as are met with in the writings of Moses, and no where else.(o)

As to the PROPHECIES, the only other compositions in the Old Testament I intend to specify here, it may be observed, that they *all* entered the Septuagint version of which I have already spoken, and which was executed at least 287 years before Christ, through the means of Demetrius Phalereus, and by the command of Ptolemy Philadelphus. I know very well that Dean Prideaux affirms on the evidence of Philo, Josephus, and a few others, who had never seen the original version of the LXX, that it only

(o) See, farther, J. D. Michaelis in R. Lowth *Prælectiones, Note, et Epimetra*, p. 185. And Thomas Scott's Translation of Job.

contained the Law. But Aristobulus, who was an Alexandrian Jew, tutor to an Egyptian king, living within 100 years after the translation was made, and having free access to it in the Royal library, affirms, that “the *whole* Sacred Scripture was *rightly* translated,” by the means just mentioned. (*p*) Here, then, is strong evidence of the correctness of the original Greek translation. And the general correspondence of the Hebrew Bibles now in existence, and of the Septuagint copies in Greek, is a proof that both have been handed down to us without material variation, and that either is therefore in the main genuine and authentic. Thus, then, we establish the existence of the Prophetic books of the Old Testament (nearly as we now have them) at least 287 years before the Christian æra; and we may farther remark, that most of them are referred to and quoted, often with high distinction, by Christ and his Apostles, in the several passages mentioned below. (*q*) I

(*p*) Euseb. *Præp. Evan.* 1, 1.

(*q*) *Isaiah*, in Matt. iv. 14. viii. 17. xii. 17. xiii. 14. Mark vii. 6. Luke iii. 4. iv. 7. John xii. 39. 41. Acts viii. 28. xxviii. 25. Romans ix. 27. x. 16. 20, &c. *Jeremiah*, Matt. ii. 17, 18. xvi. 14. *Ezekiel*, compare Rev. xix. 17—21, xx. 8, 9, with Ezek. xxxviii. and xxxix. 1—20. *Daniel*, Ezek. xiv. 14. xxviii. 3. Matt. xxiv. 15. Mark xlii. 14. *Hosea*, Matt. iii. 15. ix. 13. xii. 7. Rom. ix. 25, 26. *Joel*, Acts ii. 16. Rom. x. 13. *Amos*, Acts vii. 42, 43. xv. 15. 17. *Jonah*, Matt. xii. 39. 41. xiv. 4. Luke xi. 29, 30. *Micah*, Matt.

shall only add, that our Saviour's emphatic language, " All things **MUST** be fulfilled which were written in " the *Law of Moses*, and in the *Prophets*, and in " the *Psalms*, concerning me," (r) is a remarkable attestation in favour of the *truth*, in the fullest sense, of all the books of the Old Testament, since he here adopts the threefold distribution under which the Jews comprehended every portion of their Sacred volume.

That this latter testimony, however, may bear upon our inquiry with all the weight to which it is entitled, it is now requisite that we investigate the genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament. And here, in addition to the general arguments advanced in the beginning of this letter, I shall adduce a few particular evidences. Now, first, it is indisputable, that the primitive publishers of Christianity wrote books containing an account of the life and doctrine of their master, several of which bore the names of the several books which now constitute the New Testament : and, farther, passages cited from those books by very early writers, are found in the

ii. 5, 6. John vii. 42. *Habakkuk*, Acts xiii. 41. Rom. i. 17. Gal. iii. 2. Heb. x. 37, 38. *Haggai*, Heb. ii. 26. *Zechariah*, Matt. xxi. 4, 5. xxvi. 31. Mark xiv. 27. John xii. 15, xix. 37. Rev. i. 7. *Malachi*, Matt. xi. 10. xvii. 10—12. Mark i. 2, ix. 12. Luke i. 16, 17. vii. 27. xvi. 26. Rom. ix. 13.

(r) Luke xxiv. 44.

copies now existing of the respective books. Secondly, the early Christians had as good opportunities of satisfying themselves as to the genuineness of these books, as other ancients had with regard to the genuineness of books on other subjects which they received : and, since the new religion required considerable renunciations, and exposed its professors to heavy persecutions, it is unreasonable to suppose they would adopt it without a due examination. Thirdly, there were many books issued under the *names* of the Apostles, which were, notwithstanding, rejected by the primitive Christians ; which proves that they were not very open to deception. Fourthly, we do not find that either the Jews or the Heathens, with whom the early Christian apologists were engaged, ever called in question the genuineness of the records to which their attention was called. Fifthly, the books of the New Testament were, in very early times, collected into a distinct volume. Thus, EUSEBIUS says that Quadratus and others, the immediate successors of the apostles, carried the *gospels* with them in their travels. MELITO speaks of the Old Testament, as in contradiction to the collection called the *New Testament*. TERTULLIAN divides the Christian scriptures into the *Gospels* and *Apostles*, and calls the whole volume the *New Testament*.

But, farther, the principal books of the New Testament are quoted, or alluded to, by a series of Chris-

tian writers, in regular succession, from the apostolic times. **IGNATIUS**, for example, became Bishop of Antioch 37 years after Christ's Ascension. In his Epistles are undoubted allusions to the Gospels of Matthew and John, though they are not marked as quotations.

**POLYCARP**, who had been taught by the Apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, has nearly forty allusions to the New Testament in one short epistle, several of them quoted, without hesitation, as the words of Christ. He obviously quotes from Matthew, Acts, Romans, 1st and 2d Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1st and 2d Thessalonians, 1st and 2d Timothy, 1st Peter, and 1st John.

**JUSTIN MARTYR**, who died at latest about the year 163, has several distinct and copious extracts from the Gospels and the Acts. In all his works there are but two instances in which he refers to any thing, as said or done by Christ, which is not related in the Gospels now extant. All his references suppose the books notorious, and that there were no other accounts of Christ received and credited. He also says expressly, that the "Memoirs of the Apostles (which elsewhere he calls the *Gospels*) are "read in public worship."

**HEGESIPPUS**, a converted Jew, who came 30 years after Justin, says, that in his journey from Palestine

to Rome, "in every city the same doctrine was taught, which the *law*, and the prophets, and *the Lord* teacheth."

POTHINUS, bishop of Lyons about 170, then 90 years old, sent an epistle to Asia containing an account of the sufferings of that Church. In this epistle he makes exact references to the gospels of Luke and John, and to the Acts of the Apostles.

- IRENAEUS, successor to Pothinus, gives positive testimony to most of the books of the New Testament. He does not, however, quote Jude: but from the book of Revelations he makes frequent and large quotations. He asserts, that the story which the gospels exhibit is that which the Apostles told, and that the gospels were written "*as the foundation and pillar of our faith.*" He then describes the authors, traces the origin, and defends the genuineness of their histories. He affirms also, that in his time there were *four*, and *only four* gospels, which by his reference appear to be those we now have.

These persons, it should be remarked, though their testimonies concur, lived in countries remote from one another. Ignatius flourished at Antioch; Polycarp at Smyrna; Justin Martyr in Syria; Pothinus and Irenaeus in France.

ATHENAGORAS, who lived between 166 and 178, and before his conversion was an Athenian philosopher, wrote an able Apology for Christianity, which

he addressed to the emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, and Lucius Commodus. In this, and in his discourse on the Resurrection, he quotes Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1st and 2d Corinthians, Galatians, and 1st Timothy. He seems also to refer to passages in James, 2d Peter, and Revelations.

TERTULLIAN, presbyter of Carthage, flourished at the end of the second and beginning of the third century. In his works, which are numerous and still well known, he expressly quotes all the books of the New Testament, except *James*, the second epistle of *Peter*, and third of *John*. It has been remarked, that there are more quotations from the New Testament in his writings, than from the various writings of TULLY in all the ancient books in the world. This writer intimates, that the actual *autographs* of the Apostolic writings, or at least of some of them, were preserved till the age in which he lived, and were then to be seen.(r)

After Tertullian, the successive, though in part cotemporaneous writers, HIPPOLYTUS, ORIGEN, GREGORY, DIONYSIUS, CYPRIAN, ANTONIUS, &c. all of whom furnish strong and decided testimonies,

(r) *Age jam, qui voles Curiositatem melius exercere in negotio salutis tue, percurre Ecclesiæ Apostolicas, apud quas ipse adhuc Cathédrae Apostolorum suis Locis præsident, apud quas ipse Authentice Literæ eorum recitantur. De Prescript. adversus Hæreticos.*

bring us to the time of EUSEBIUS, who flourished about the year 315, and was the most accurate historian among the ancient Christian writers. He mentions it as a fact well known, and asserted by Origen and others, his predecessors, that the four gospels of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*, the *Epistles of St. Paul*, one of *Peter*, and one of *John*, were UNIVERSALLY received by the Church. He says Origen calls them εὐαγγέλια αναντίρρητα and ομολογουμένοι, as not being able to find that they had ever been disputed. And, though the *Acts* are not expressly mentioned by Origen in this catalogue, Eusebius himself declares that he has no scruple concerning that book: nay, Origen himself, in another place, mentions the *Acts* as written by *Luke*, and pays the same regard to them as to the other books of the New Testament. As to the remaining seven books of the New Testament, i. e. the epistle to the *Hebrews*, the epistle of *James*, the 2d of *Peter*, the 2d and 3d of *John*, *Jude*, and the *Revelations*, which had been disputed, and were therefore called by Eusebius ἀντιλεγομένοι: yet he asserts, that they were at length introduced into the *Canon*, that is, into the number of those books which Christians regarded as the rule of their faith and practice, and which they distinguished from other books written by persons whom they thought less eminently under

the divine direction, whatever their sanctity might be: (s)

From the time of Eusebius, the works of Christian writers abound in references in the New Testament. But, instead of citing more, I may next observe, that the Scriptures were spoken of, and either received, or so appealed to, by the various early sects among Christians, as to prove their existence, nearly in their present shape.. Thus, Tertullian assures us that *Dositheus* (who was a cotemporary with the Apostles) was the first who dared to reject the authority of the prophets, by denying their inspiration: but both he and his followers allowed the five books of Moses to be divine. The *Elionites* again, in the first century, allowed the existence of all the books of the New Testament, but only received as *divine* the gospel by Matthew. The *Valentinians*, about the year 120, appealed to the *evangelic* and *apostolic* writings. The testimony of Chrysostom (A. D. 398) is, that " though *many* heresies have arisen, yet *all* " have received the *gospels*, either entire, or in " part."

In favour of the early existence of the principal books of the New Testament, I must not forget to urge that the first heathen adversaries of Christianity speak of the historical books as containing the ac-

(s) Euseb. Eccles. Hist. I, iii, c. xxv.

counts upon which the religion was founded. Celsus, for example, in the second century, writing against Christianity, alludes to books written by the disciples of Jesus. He accuses the Christians of altering the gospel, but this accusation is not made out by any important variations existing in the present day. He says his arguments are drawn from *their own writings*. He makes the largest and most remarkable concessions about Jesus Christ; confessing the truth of his nativity, his journey into Egypt, his passing from place to place with his disciples, the fact of his miracles, his being betrayed, and lastly his passion and death. It is true he ridicules most of these particulars; but he does not attempt to deny them, which he would have been ready enough to do could he have done it with any show of reason. (t)

PORPHYRY again, in the third century, though a most inveterate enemy to Christianity, not only allowed that there was such a person as Christ, but honoured him as a most wise and pious man, and one who was translated into heaven. He thought however, that, by overthrowing the Gospels and the Acts, he should overthrow the Christian Religion itself. Speaking of Matthew in writing against the Christians, he calls him *their evangelist*. (v)

(t) Lardner's Heath. Test. vol. iii. c. 18.

(v) Euseb. Dem. Evang. l. iii. p. 134.

JULIAN, in the fourth century, recites the sayings of Christ in the very words of the Evangelists, states the early dates of these records, and calls them by the names they now bear, without questioning their genuineness. He endeavours to lessen the reputation of Christ's life and miracles, by telling the world that he " did nothing worthy of note all the " while he was here upon earth (notwithstanding all " the noise that was made about him), except a per- " son will reckon it a great work, to open the eyes, " of the blind, to restore limbs to the lame, and de- " liver persons possessed from the power and en- " chantment of devils." (w) His great object seems always to cause the *Divinity* of Jesus Christ to be suspected; and therefore he argues that neither *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, nor *Paul* himself, ever presumed in direct terms to call him God, but it was St. John (*ὁ χενὸς Ἰωάννης*) who talked after this manner: that John, perceiving how the persuasion of Christ's being God prevailed mightily among the Christians dispersed through the cities of Greece and Italy, took upon him to assert the same doctrine in his *Gospel*, with a view to humour them, and obtain himself reputation. (x) Now, however wrong may

(w) Cyril Alexandr. contra Julian. l. vi. p. 191. Ed. Par. 1638.

(x) Cyril contra Julian. l. x. p. 327.

be the reason assigned here for John's conduct, the concession of Julian is important, in so far as it proves that he took the writings which in his time bore the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul, to be the genuine productions of those authors; and farther, because it shows that John's Gospel bore then the same testimony respecting the divinity of Jesus Christ which it now bears.

Besides these, there are several other evidences of the genuineness and truth of the various books of the New Testament, into which I cannot now enter minutely. But I must briefly advert to the cogent arguments so ably advanced by the late venerable Dr. Paley, drawn from the numerous obviously *un-designed* coincidences, mutually subsisting between the several epistles of St. Paul and the History of the Acts of the Apostles: these coincidences are so little seen by common observers, that it is impossible to suppose them the effect of forgery; an examination of them is sufficient to prove that neither the history was forged to square with the letters, nor the letters to accord with the history; that they are too numerous and close to be accounted for by the accidental, or by the designed, concurrences of fiction, or in any other way than by the uniformity of the tendency of truth to one point. (y)

(y) For a full developement and application of this train of argumentation, see Dr. Paley's admirable work entitled "*Hora*.

I have already remarked, on the authority of Eusebius, that some of the books now admitted into the New Testament, were for a while disputed in the early ages of the Church. I may here add, that a few small portions of particular books have had their authenticity called in question by modern critics. Of the latter class are the first two chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel, which have been recently much controverted by those who impugn the doctrine, or rather fact, of Christ's miraculous conception, stated in those chapters, and some of whom forget that the same fact is asserted in Luke's Gospel. Without entering at large into this question, it may suffice to remark that both Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, have quoted from these two chapters without signifying any doubt of their authenticity; and to affirm, on the authority of a very learned and judicious critic, Dr. Herbert Marsh, in his valuable notes to Michaelis, that the evidence of the *Greek* manuscripts is *decidedly* in favour of the authenticity of these two chapters; and that the testimony of the ancient versions is equally decisive, these chapters being contained in them all. Besides, how can it well be imagined that those two are spurious, when the begin-

"*Paulinae.*" This book has now been published nearly twenty years, during all which period, though many of the Infidel host have "gnashed their teeth" at it in private, *not one has attempted to refute it.*

ning of the third chapter is considered? What writer would begin a history with the phrase, "In those 'days'?" (z)

You will expect that I should produce some evidence in favour of the genuineness of the Apocalypse, or Revelations of St. John, especially since this book has been given up as doubtful by some late-writers in favour of the New Testament. Allow me, then, to observe on this subject, that Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clemens Alexandrinus, allow the Apocalypse to be an ancient book, and ascribe it to "*John, the disciple of the Lord.*" And, if we may credit the testimonies of Eusebius and Jerome, who had in their hands the writings of many of the ancients which are now lost, Papias, Melito, Theophilus of Antioch, and Apollonius, *all in the second century*, received and quoted it. Consider, in addition to this, the author's own language. "The 'Revelation of Jesus Christ,'" &c.—"sent and 'signified by his angel unto his servant *John*." "John to the seven churches." "I *John*, who 'also am your brother, and companion in tribulation'"—"was in the Isle that is called *Patmos*, for

(z) There is a very able defence of the authenticity of the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel in the Quarterly Review, vol. i. p. 320—330, from which I should have been happy to borrow some passages, were I not compelled by my plan to consult brevity.

"the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." "I was in the spirit in the Lord's day." This same writer, who thus positively and unequivocally declares himself to be JOHN, imprisoned in the isle of Patmos, writing under inspiration on the Lord's day, affirms that "ALL liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," and in another place excludes from celestial glory "*whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.*" Adopt, for a moment, the hypothesis that this book was forged, and nothing can be more shocking and blasphemous than the conduct of its author impudently assuming the language of "Him who searcheth the reins and the heart;" admit, on the contrary, the genuineness and authenticity of the book, and you are overpowered with the majesty and sublimity of its language, the purity and excellency of its precepts, the awfulness of its denunciations, the supernatural grandeur of its promises: and, to stamp the highest possible authority upon the whole, bear in mind that it contains *prophecies*, several of which have already been accomplished.

You will rejoice, as I assure you I do, that my labours on the multifarious topics of this letter are drawing to a close. I shall leave you in your future meditations to appreciate the full weight of what I have adduced. In opposition to it you will have merely to place the reiterated, though perfectly un-

*supported*, assertion, that the Scriptures are forged. But had I not wished to put you in possession of a condensed body of evidence, by referring to which you may "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men," I might have refuted this assertion by simply referring to the great *end* of the Sacred Volume, and the unity of design in all its authors. I might have affirmed, without fear of contradiction, that the coincidence of the histories, precepts, promises, threatenings, and prophecies of the Scriptures, in that great end, "the glory of God, and the holiness and happiness of man," is an irrefragable argument not only of their genuineness and truth, but of their divine authority. I might have affirmed, that if the several writers had been guided by their own spirits, and not by the illuminating and supporting influences of the spirit of truth, they could neither have unfolded to us the various dispensations of God tending to this one point, nor have pursued it themselves with such entire steadiness and uniformity through so many different ages of the world. Viewed in this light, the *gradual* opening of the design is an invincible argument. The wisdom of man, if it could ever have formed such a design (though that, as I have shown in a former letter, was far from the case), would have rushed forward to the grand conclusion precipitately. On the whole, then, I think every candid inquirer after truth must be constrained

to admit, that the various writers of the Bible were *not* deceivers, that the books they have left us are *genuine*, that the religion contained in those books is *true*, that it emanated from *God*. Whence, indeed,

“ but from HEAVEN should men unskill'd in arts,  
“ In different ages born, in different parts,  
“ Weave such *agreeing* truths? or how? or why?  
“ Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?  
“ Unask'd their pains, ungrateful their advice;  
“ Starving their gains, and *martyrdom* their price.”

DRYDEN.

There remains only one other question to consider before I terminate this letter, namely, “ Have the *Scriptures descended pure to our hands, or do the copies extant differ materially from those which existed in the primitive ages?*” Now, in answer to this, it may be stated, with regard to the *New Testament*, as the universal opinion of all Biblical critics of competent knowledge and judgment, that we have received it pure and genuine. This is evinced by the accordance of the early versions with our present Greek text: by the collations which have taken place of great numbers of existing manuscripts, some of them extremely ancient; which collations while they show that mistakes, as it was to be expected, have been made in the individual manu-

scripts by the transcribers, prove those mistakes to be of trifling importance, such as never affect the relation of any important fact, or the statement of any important doctrine, and afford the means of correcting them : and by the utter impossibility that either negligence or design could have introduced, without detection, any material alteration into a book dispersed among millions in widely distant countries, and among many discordant sects ; regarded by them all as the rule of their faith and practice ; and in constant and regular use among them all in public worship, in private meditation, and in their vehement and unceasing controversies with each other. (a)

With regard to the BIBLE in general, including both the Old Testament (or Covenant) and the New, it has unexpectedly met with strong additional confirmation, as to the correctness of the most received versions, in the discoveries of recent travellers in India. Dr. Buchanan, especially, who in 1806 visited the fifty-five Syrian churches in Malaya, was informed by the inhabitants that no European had, to their knowledge, visited the place before. Their liturgy is derived from that of the early church at Antioch. They affirm too, that their version of the Scriptures was copied from that used by the primi-

(a) Gisborne's Familiar Survey, p. 229. Doddridge's Pneumatology, &c. Lect. 118, 119.

five Christians at Antioch, and brought to India before or about the council of Nice, A. D. 325, at which council some ecclesiastical historians inform us *Joannes*, bishop of India, attended. These Syrian Christians allege also, that their copies have ever been exact transcripts of that version, without known error, through every age, down to this day. Dr. Buchanan is persuaded, that some of their present copies are of very ancient date : though written on a strong thick paper (like that of some MSS. in the British Museum, commonly called *Eastern paper*), the ink has, in several places, eaten through the material in the exact form of the letter. In other copies, where the ink had less of a corroding quality, it has fallen off, and left a dark vestige of the letter, faint indeed, but not in general illegible. There is one volume found in a remote church of the mountains, which merits particular description :—it contains the Old and New Testaments, engrossed on strong vellum, in large folio, having three columns in the page, and is written with beautiful accuracy. The character is *Estrangelo-Syriac*, and the words of every book are numbered. This volume is illuminated, but not after the European manner, the initial letters having no ornament. Prefixed to each book there are figures of principal Scripture characters (not rudely drawn), the colours of which are distinguishable ; and in some places the enamel of the

gilding is preserved : but the volume has suffered injury from time or neglect, some of the leaves being almost entirely decayed. In certain places the ink has been totally obliterated from the page, and has left the parchment in its natural whiteness ; but the letters can, in general, be distinctly traced from the impress of the pen, or from the partial corrosion of the ink. The Syrian church assigns to this manuscript a high antiquity ; and alleges that it has been for some centuries in the possession of their bishops ; and that it was industriously concealed from the Romish inquisition in 1599 : but its true age can only be ascertained by a comparison with old manuscripts in Europe of a similar kind, and from such a comparison its date has been referred to the seventh century. On the margin of the drawings are some old Roman and Greek letters, the form of which may lead to a conjecture respecting the age in which they were written. This copy of the Scriptures has admitted as canonical the epistle of Clement, in which respect it resembles the Alexandrine manuscript : but it has omitted the Revelations,—that book having been accounted apocryphal by some churches during a certain period in the early ages. The order of books of the Old and New Testament differs from that of the European copies,—this copy adhering less to unity of subject in the arrangement than to chronological order. The very first emendation of the

Hebrew text proposed by Dr. Kennicott (Gen. iv. 8.) is to be found in this manuscript. The disputed passage, 1 John, v. 7, is not to be found in it : in almost every other respect, its several books agree with those which Europeans obtained ages ago through other channels. (*b*)

I have only to add, that this most valuable and interesting manuscript is now in England. Mar Dionysius, the resident Bishop at Cadanette, presented it to Dr. Buchanan, who again has presented it to the University of Cambridge, in whose Public Library it is now lodged. It has been lately examined with great care and skill by Mr. Yeates, who has published a more minute account of it than the above, in the Christian Observer. (*c*) These particularities, in reference and description, will prove to you the value I attach to the discovery of this Manuscript. Its existence will compel unbelievers to drop, as broken and pointless, their favourite weapon against the genuineness of our Scriptures. I therefore consider its preservation as another interposition of Divine Providence in favour of the Christian Religion ; another reward to European Christians for their zeal and activity in transmitting the benefits of

(*b*) Tillock's Philosophical Magazine, N° 115.

(*c*)—Christian Observer, for May and June, 1810.

the Gospel to heathen nations : and I rejoice in this  
fresh instance, in which ——

"I may assert eternal Providence,

"And justify the ways of God with men."

**LETTER VI.***On the Evidence deducible from the Prophecies.*

IT is well, my dear Friend, for Christians in general, that they can arrive at a perfect conviction of the truth of the religion they profess, a well-grounded assurance of "the hope that is in them," (d) Without instituting any such tiresome investigation as that, the results of which were laid before you in my last letter. Such an inquiry may serve to convince unbelievers, that even the *external* evidences of Christianity are, in their *nature*, really irresistible to all those who do not voluntarily sheath their understandings against the impressions of evidence flowing from all quarters, and shut their eyes against the light of truth : but those who are willing to derive conviction from the fountain of divine knowledge, have a far shorter way to arrive at it than that we have so recently been tracing. The Bible is its own witness : the predictions scattered through it prove its divine origin. Other evidences *may* obtain admission to the mind, but this species demands it : others *may* dispel darkness, but this comes clothed

(d) 1 Peter iii. 15.

in light. In the present world we are in a benighted state; but, happily, "we have a sure word of prophecy, whereunto we do well that we take heed, "as unto a light that shineth into a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts." (e)

Prophecy, viewed in the sense we now wish to contemplate it, that is, as denoting the prediction of future events depending on the action of free agents, (f) was, obviously, never intended as evidence of an original revelation. It is plainly unfit for such a purpose, because it is impossible, without some extrinsic proof of its divine origin, to know whether any prophecy be true or false, till the æra arrive at which it ought to be accomplished. Yet, the frequent occurrence of prophecies may be productive of great religious advantages antecedently to their being fulfilled, since it may keep alive a sense of religion, and inspire with a hope of future deliverance from present calamity, such as slavery or banishment. And this seems to have been one great object in delivering the prophecies under the Old Testament dispensation, since most of them pointed to emancipation from either bodily or spiritual bondage.

(e) 2 Peter i. 19.

(f) I give this definition because the word is sometimes used in Scripture to denote preaching or teaching. See Nehemiah vi. 7.

But, whatever may be the tendency or the utility of prophecy previously to its completion, its tendency subsequent to such completion is, so far as it is known, decidedly and inevitably favourable to the divine appointment of him who delivered the prediction, and in certain cases to the divine selection of the person to whom such prediction points. The foreknowledge of future contingent events is universally allowed to be a peculiar attribute of Deity. Future contingencies, such, for example, as those which relate to the rise and fall of nations and states not yet in existence, or to the minute concerns of individuals not yet born, are secrets which it is evident no man nor angel can penetrate ; their causes being indeterminate, their relations with other things fluctuating and unknown : it follows, therefore, that the prediction of such contingent events cannot otherwise than proceed from God ; and, farther, since God cannot, without a violation of his perfect Holiness and Rectitude, visibly aid delusion and wickedness, the inference is equally cogent and necessary, that the accomplishment of predictions delivered by those who pretend they have divine authority, amounts to a full proof that they really possess the authority they assume. Other arguments may be evaded ; other evidence may not convince ; strange effects (though not *miraculous* ones) may be produced by other than divine power : but the plain

and complete correspondence of events to the standing records of ancient prophecies, obvious and conspicuous to all who will be at the pains to compare them, and applying accurately to the nicest shades of the specified circumstances, suggests most forcibly the conviction, that the predictions came from God, and were declared to man for the wisest and most important purposes.

This, then, is a kind of evidence that may be known, read, and appreciated by all men; and this is the species of evidence with which every part of Scripture, from the Pentateuch to the Apocalypse, abounds. The history of the fall of man is immediately succeeded by the significant prediction of that "Seed of the Woman which should bruise the Serpent's head." Even here the Messiah was marked out so as not to be mistaken: the prophecy has never been applied to another: the "light of the world" shone distinctly, though it might, notwithstanding, glimmer feebly, when seen through the long vists of four thousand years. Previous to the general deluge the will of God was but seldom declared in prophecy; but almost immediately after that remarkable event, Noah delivered some extraordinary predictions relative to the descendants of his three sons; and those predictions, though they were divulged more than 2000 years before the Christian era, have been fulfilling through the several periods of time to

this day! In like manner the prophecies revealed from time to time, as those concerning the Ishmaelites, those of dying Jacob, of Balaam, of Moses (concerning the Jews), the prophecies relating to Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, the great Empires, the destruction of Jerusalem, have been perfectly fulfilled to the minutest particular; and that, in several cases where attempts have actually been made to prevent their accomplishment. Moses, for example, foretold, that when the Jews forsook the true God they should be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, that "they should become an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word among all nations" (g). None can be so regardless of truth, as to deny that this is fully accomplished. Concerning Babylon it was foretold, that it should be shut up and besieged by the Medes, Elamites, and Armenians; that the river should be dried up; that the city should be taken in the midst of a feast; that the conqueror should be named Cyrus. (h) All of which, as you are well aware, came to pass. Concerning Egypt it was predicted, "Egypt shall be a base kingdom: it shall be the basest of kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the na-

(g) Deut. xxviii. 37.

(h) Isai. xxi. 2. Jer. li. 11. Isai. xliv. 7, 28. Jer. li. 30. Isai. xlvi. 1.

"tions." (i) I need not ask whether this prophecy of the fate of Egypt, so celebrated for its antiquity, its power, and its wisdom, is not fulfilled. Concerning Tyre, the prediction and its completion are no less remarkable : "I will make thee like the top of a rock ; thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon ; thou shalt be built no more.—Thou shalt be no more ; the merchants among the people shall hiss at thee ; thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt be any more." (k)

Now, in all these, and a variety of other instances that might be adduced, it cannot with any semblance of reason be pretended, that "Prophecy came in old time by the *will of man* ;" the contrary assertion of the Apostle accords far better with a fair induction from the premises before us, that "*Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*" (l) Indeed one of the most acute metaphysicians and ablest reasoners Great Britain ever produced, the friend of Newton, and his advocate, against Leibnitz, says, he feels no hesitation in putting the truth of Revealed Religion entirely upon the reality of that prophetic spirit which foretold "the man of sin," and the desolation of Christ's church and kingdom by antichrist. "If (says he, after

(i) Ezek. xxix. 14, 15. xxx. 12, 13.

(k) Ezek. xxvi. 14. 21. (l) 2 Peter i. 21.

enumerating some of the predictions that relate to *Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots*), “ if, “ in the days of St. Paul and St. John, there were “ any footsteps of such a sort of power as this in the “ world : or, if there ever had been such power in “ the world : or, if there was then any appearance “ of probability, that could make it enter into the “ heart of man to imagine that there ever *could be* “ any such kind of power in the *world*, much less in “ the *temple* or church of God : and, if there be not “ *now* such a power actually and conspicuously exer- “ cised in the world : and if any picture of this “ power, *drawn after the event*, can describe it more “ plainly and exactly than it was originally described “ in the words of the prophecy : then may it with “ some degree of plausibleness be suggested, that “ the prophecies are nothing more than enthusiastic “ inventions.” (m)

But the weight of evidence accumulates prodigiously when it is drawn from those prophecies which relate to the Messiah. Had only a single prophet left a book of predictions concerning Christ, specifying the time and manner of his coming, and he had come agreeably to those predictions, it would seem next to impossible to evade the conclusion deducible from it. But in the Bible we have much more.

(m) Dr. Clarke's Works, vol. ii. p. 728.

Here is a series of prophets, for thousands of years, who regularly succeed each other to foretel the same event, and to depict the benefits it will produce. Nay, more than this, a whole nation constitutes his harbingers : they subsist distinct from the rest of the world more than three thousand years, to testify in a body the assurances they entertain respecting him : when he arrives they disbelieve him, become reluctant witnesses of the truth of the prophecies they have preserved, but willing instruments in "*killing the Prince of Life*," (\*) and thus in accomplishing these predictions which, though they understood but in part,—they constantly hoped to see realized until their hopes were about to be fulfilled !

Nor should it be forgotten that Jesus Christ himself, during his personal ministry on earth, referred the Jews, who were then his enemies and afterwards his murderers, to their own Sacred Books, in order to learn who he was, and what was his office : and that, after his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, his disciples pointed them again to the prophecies which they read regularly in the Synagogue, to convince them that him whom they had slain was "*the Messiah who was to come.*" "*Search the Scriptures*" (said Jesus Christ), *for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.*

(\*) *Acts iii. 18.*

"Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." (o) Beginning from Moses, and from all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (p) Conformably with this, his Apostles make a like appeal. "To him (says Paul) give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. Thus, he mightily convinced the Jews, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." (q) So likewise Peter affirms, "Yea, and all the prophets, from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days." (r) This kind of argumentation was so forcible, that many of the Jews were convinced by it, and were "cut to the heart," that they should "ignorantly" have "crucified their king." But the reasoning which prevailed over the prejudices of many Jews in the apostolic times, is thought trifling and light by modern free-thinkers. If the prophecies were obscure, then that obscurity is an argument against them; if, on the contrary, they are plain, then it is boldly affirmed, in opposition to the whole train of history, that they were forged after the event. It would be more becoming the ingenuity of these

(o) John v. 39, 40. (p) Luke xxiv. 27.

(q) Acts x. 43, xiii. 27, xv. 15, xviii. 28. (r) Acts iii. 24.

men to show from the prophets that Jesus Christ was necessarily to rise from the dead, and then to prove from the history that in fact he did never rise. Then they would accomplish something, and we must assent to the force of their reasoning. But, if they cannot disprove the fact, their cavilling about the *mode* in which it was foretold is perfectly nugatory. Christ claims to be the person predicted in the law and the prophets ; his Apostles assert the same claim ; and it is far from enough to affirm on the contrary side that some of the prophecies are obscure, since very good reasons may be assigned why such obscurity should exist previously to the completion of prophecy. It might be, for instance, to make the Messiah known to the good, and unknown to the wicked, as was indeed *predicted* by Daniel (ch. xii. 10), that God caused him to be, in a certain sense, obscurely foretold. For, had the *manner* of his appearance been clearly described, there would not have been any obscurity even to bad men : and if the *time* had been obscurely predicted, even good men would have felt themselves in darkness. The time, therefore, was clearly declared ; but the manner only in figure. Hence it happened that the wicked, apprehending that the promised blessings were merely temporal, were deceived, notwithstanding the clear predictions of the time ; while the righteous were not deceived after the crucifixion of

Jesus Christ. The mode of interpreting the promised blessings depends upon the heart, which calls that which it loves—good; but the interpretation of the promised time does not depend upon the heart. So that the clear prediction of the time, and the obscure prediction of the blessings, left none to be misled but the wicked.

But the principal question for us to consider, is this: are there prophecies now sufficiently plain to prove that Christ is the person foretold in the Old Testament as the Messiah? If there be, it follows, for reasons already assigned, that the Old Testament is the Word of God, Jesus Christ the Saviour of the World, the New Testament not “a cunningly devised fable,” but a structure formed for everlasting duration, which those who endeavour to overthrow will fail in accomplishing, and be found “even to fight against God.” (s)

First, then, let us attend a little to the *time* and *place* marked out by the prophets for the appearance of the Messiah. JACOB, on his dying bed, speaks of a person to whom the people should be gathered; this person he calls *Shiloh*, and declares that he shall appear before *Judah* ceases to be a tribe. (t)

DANIEL foretels a glorious kingdom, which God would erect on the ruins of the four grand monar-

(s) Acts v. 39.

(t) Genesis xlix. 10.

chies, under the government of one whom he calls *the Son of Man*; and whose empire, though small in its origin, should be both universal and eternal. (v.) He afterwards predicts that in *seventy weeks* (of years), that is, in 490 years, after the issuing of the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem, probably referring to that given in the seventh year of *Artaxerxes Longimanus*, reconciliation should be made for iniquity, and an everlasting righteousness be brought in by one, whom he calls *Messiah the Prince*, whom he declares shall be *cut off* without any demerits of his own; after which event the prophet predicts that the city of Jerusalem shall be destroyed, and sacrifices cease; yet, not till the Messiah had confirmed his covenant with many of his people. (w.)

ISAIAH speaks of an extraordinary child, who should be born of a virgin, of the house of *David*, whose name should be called *Emanuel*, who should grow up from infancy to manhood, who should also bear many illustrious titles (such as “*the mighty*,” “*God, the everlasting Father*”), which indicate him to be more than human: he predicts, farther, that this personage should be most eminent for wisdom and piety, and as remarkable for sorrow and sufferings; and yet, finally, that he should establish a most successful and permanent kingdom by very peaceful

(v) Dan. ii. 34, 35, 44, 45, vii. 13, 14.

(w) Dan. ix. 24, 27.

and gentle methods ; these important events commencing with the cure of the blind, the lame, the deaf, and the dumb ; thus laying a foundation stone in Zion. (x)

JOEL foretels an extraordinary effusion of the Spirit of God, and speaks of a remarkable deliverance which should be wrought out in Mount Zion and Jerusalem. (y).

MICAH delivers a prophecy analogous to part of Isaiah's, respecting the glorious and peaceful kingdom that God would erect in "the latter day;" and afterwards expressly mentions *Bethlehem Ephratah* as the place whence should go forth the ruler, who should be the illustrious shepherd both of the Israelites and of other distant people. (z)

HAGGAI prophesies that, during the time in which the second temple was standing, a temple which was not entirely demolished till the captivity by the Romans (though in Herod's time gradually rebuilt), God would "shake all nations," and the "desire of all nations" should come into his temple : and that, on this account, the glory of it should be greater than that of the former house, though it was much inferior in external visible ornaments. (a)

(x) Isai. vii. 14. ix. 5—7. xi. 1—10. xlii. 1—7. lxx. xxxv. 9.  
10. xxviii. 16.

(y) Joel ii. 28—32.

(z) Micah iv. 1—5. v. 2—4.

(a) Hag. ii. 6—9.

MALACHI predicts, that "the Lord" should have a forerunner. (b)

Now these and some other prophecies, which I do not here quote, so accurately define the time and place in which the Messiah was to appear, that there was an universal expectation of his appearance, as all the candid Jewish writers acknowledge, just about the time that Jesus Christ was upon earth. In point of time and place, then, he corresponds with the results of prophecy.

Secondly. Let us advert to predictions relative to his *Character, Doctrine, Rejection, and final Triumph*. In these respects we recognise Jesus Christ as foretold in the prophets by the following among a great number of particular circumstances : That as a prophet he should be like unto Moses. (c) That he should blind the eyes of the wise and learned, and preach the Gospel to the poor and despised ; that he should restore health to the diseased, and give light to those who languished in mental and moral darkness. (d) That he should teach the perfect way, and be the instructor of the Gentiles. (e) That he would write *his* law, not on tables of stone, but on their hearts, and put his fear, which till then was displayed in external ceremonies, into their hearts

(b) Mal. iii. 1.

(c) Deut. xviii. 15. Acts iii. 22.

(d) Isai. v. 15. xxxv. 5. ix. 2.

(e) Isai. xlvi. 6.

likewise. (f) That he should sit as a refiner and purifier, to purge his disciples, that they might offer righteous offering. (g) That he should be a sacrifice for the sins of the world, be wounded for the transgressions of his people, and make intercession for the transgressors. (h) That he should be the chief and precious corner stone, and yet be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence, on which the Jews should fall. (i) That the Jews should reject him, and should themselves be rejected of God, the choice vine bringing forth only wild grapes; and that the chosen people should be rebellious and gainsaying, and stumble at noon day. (k) That the stone which was rejected by the builders should be made the principal corner stone, that it should grow into a great mountain and fill the whole earth. (l) That after the rejection and murder of the Messiah, he should rise again the third day from the dead. (m) That he should ascend into heaven, and sit on the right-hand of God, where he should triumph over all his enemies. (n) That the kings of the earth, and all people, should in due time worship him. (o) But that the Jews who re-

(f) Jer. xxxi. 33. xxxii. 40.

(g) Mal. iii. 3.

(h) Isai. liii.

(i) Isai. xxviii. 16. viii. 14, 15.

(k) Isai. v. 2—7. lxv. 2. Deut. xxviii. 28, 29.

(l) Psalm cxviii. 22. Dan. ii. 35.

(m) Ps. xvi. 10; Hos. vi. 3.

(n) Ps. cx. 1.

(o) Isai. lx, 10. 21, 22. lxx. 11, 12.

jected him should subsist as a distinct people ; but should be scattered over all nations, and wander about without princes, without sacrifices, without an altar, without prophets, looking for deliverance, and not finding it till a very distant period. (*p*)

Thirdly. The amazing correspondence between the contemptuous treatment and *sufferings* of Jesus Christ, and the predictions scattered through the Bible, has been traced so clearly by several writers, (*q*) that I need do little else than transcribe their remarks. On comparing the principal predictions with the historical passages, and thus bringing the accounts of the Prophets and of the Evangelists together, it will be found that the latter become as it were echoes of the former, and that the Messiah was to suffer nothing which Christ did not suffer. **ZECHARIAH** says, "they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver ;" and **MATTHEW** records that Judas sold Jesus for neither more nor fewer pieces, but that the chief priests "covenanted with him for "thirty pieces of silver." (*r*) **ZECHARIAH** says, they "took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them

(*p*) Jer. xxxi. 36. Hos. iii. 4, 5.

(*q*) See especially Bishop Pearson on the Creed, p. 88, &c. and General Burn's judicious summary of the Evidences of Christianity, in his valuable little book, "The Christian Officer's Complete Armour."

(*r*) Zech. xi. 12. Matt. xxvi. 15.

"*to the potter;*" MATTHEW tells us, "they took  
"the thirty pieces of silver, and gave them for the  
"*potter's field.*" (s) The PSALMIST, under the spi-  
rit of prophecy, says, when "trouble is near there  
"is *none* to help," and ZECHARIAH says, "Smite  
"the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered;"  
MATTHEW in correspondence affirms, "that the  
"scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled, *all*  
"the disciples forsook him and fled." (t) ISAIAH  
says, "he was wounded;" ZECHARIAH, "they shall  
"look upon me whom they have pierced;" and DA-  
VID still more particularly, "they pierced my hands  
"and my feet;" the Evangelists tell us how he was  
fastened to the cross, and Jesus himself shows "the  
"print of the nails." (v) DAVID predicts, "they  
"shall laugh him to scorn, and shake their heads,  
"saying, He trusted in the Lord that he would de-  
"liver him; let him deliver him, saying he delighted  
"in him :" the historian describes the same action,  
and the same expressions ;—"they that passed by re-  
"viled him, wagging their heads, and saying, He  
"trusted in God, let him deliver him."(w) DAVID

(s) Zech. xi. 13. Matt. xxvii. 9, 10.

(t) Ps. xxii. 11. Zech. xiii. 7. Matt. xxvi. 56.

(v) Isat. liii. 5. Zech. xiii. 10. Ps. xxii. 16. Matt. xxvii.

35. John xx. 25.

(w) Ps. xxii. 7, 8. Matt. xxvii. 39, 43.

exclaims, when prophesying as a type of the Messiah, “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? ” he who was both “ the root and the offspring of David,” determines in whose person the father spoke it,—“ *Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani ?* (x) ISAIAH foretels, “ He was numbered with the *transgressors* :” the Evangelists inform us, he was “ crucified between two thieves, one on his right-hand, the other on his left.” (y) We read in the prophetic Psalms, “ They gave me gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink :” and in the Gospel, “ they gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall.” (z) We read again in the Psalms, “ They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture ;” and, to fulfil the prediction, the soldiers “ took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part, and also his coat. Now, the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout : they said, therefore, among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it whose it shall be.” (a) In another prophet we read, “ he shall be brought like a lamb to the slaughter, and be cut off out of the land of the living :” (b) Con-

(x) Ps. xxii. 1. Matt. xxvii. 46.

(y) Isai. liii. 12. Matt. xxvii. 38. Mark xv. 27.

(z) Ps. lxix. 21. Matt. xxvii. 34. 48.

(a) Ps. xxii. 18. John xix. 23, 24. (b) Isai. lili. 7; 8.

formably with this, all the Evangelists declare how like a lamb he suffered, and the Jews themselves acknowledge that he was "cut off." In the institution of the paschal lamb, which typified this "Lamb of God," it was ordained, "ye shall not break a bone of it :" DAVID, prophesying of the Messiah, says, "he keepeth all his bones ; not one of them is broken :" and, in the event, "He who saw it bare record, and he knoweth that he saith true ;" and he affirms, "they brake not his legs," (though they brake the legs of the malefactors crucified with him), "that the Scripture should be fulfilled, 'A bone of him shall not be broken.' (c) ISAIAH, prophesying of his burial, says, "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death :" and here again we may admire the exact completion of the prediction ; for Jesus was buried like the wicked companions of his death, under the general leave granted to the Jews for taking down their bodies from the Cross ; yet Joseph of Arimathaea, a rich man, and an honourable counsellor, and Nicodemus, a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews, a master of Israel, conspired to "make his grave with the rich," by "wrapping his body

(c) Numb. ix. 12. Exod. xii. 46. Ps. xxxiv. 20. John xix. 33. 35, 36.

“in linen clothes,” &c. and “laying it in a new sepulchre,” which Joseph of Arimathea had caused to “be made for his own use.” (d) When the Scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus Christ for a sign by which they might ascertain his Divine authority, the reply was, “As Jonas was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth;” (e) and, on another occasion, when the Jews requested a proof of his authority, he said, “speaking of the temple of his body,” “destroy *this* temple, and in *three* days I will raise *it* up.” (f) These sayings were tauntingly thrown in his teeth during his crucifixion, by the unfeeling multitude, who, “wagging their heads, said, Ah! thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save *thyself*, and come down from the cross!” (g) Soon, however, Jesus proved that he *had* “power to lay down his life, and power to take it up again;” (h) and, to fulfil his own prophecies, as well as all those relating to him that were scattered through the Jewish Scriptures, burst the bars of the tomb, and rose from the dead on the *third* day. (i)

(d) Isai. liii. 9. Matt. xxvii. 57. Mark xv. 43. John xix. 39, 40.

(e) Matt. xiii. 40. (f) John ii. 19. (g) Mark xv. 29, 30.

(h) John x. 18. (i) Luke xxiv. 7.

The preceding instances are abundantly more than sufficient to show that, according to the prophets, thus it behoved the **MESSIAH** to suffer, to die, and to rise again ; and that, according to the testimony of eye witnesses, who could not be deceived, who had no object to accomplish in deceiving others, and whose testimony is confirmed by their enemies and persecutors, thus **JESUS CHRIST DID suffer, die, and rise again.** How the contemplation of these things may affect others, I do not pretend to conjecture ; but surely the natural tendency of such an astonishing correspondence as that we have been tracing, is to “make our hearts burn within us” with the cheering warmth of conviction, and the pure flame of devotion, similar to what was experienced by the two disciples on that ever memorable evening, when the risen Saviour “talked with them in their way” to Emmaus, “opened to them the Scriptures, and, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, expound-“ed unto them the things concerning himself.” (k)

Suppose that, instead of the spirit of prophecy breathing more or less in every book of scripture, predicting events relative to a great variety of general topics, and delivering, besides, almost innumerable characteristics of the Messiah all meeting in the person of Jesus,—there had been only *ten* men in an-

(k) Luke xxiv. 13, 27, 32.

cient times who pretended to be prophets, each of whom exhibited only *five* independent criteria as to place, government, concomitant events, doctrine taught, effects of doctrine, character, sufferings, or death ; the meeting of all which, in one person, should prove the reality of their calling as prophets, and of his mission in the character they have assigned him :—suppose, moreover, that all events were left to *chance* merely, and we were to compute, from the principles employed by mathematicians in the investigation of such subjects, the probability of these *fifty* independent circumstances happening *at all*. Assume that there is, according to the technical phrase, *an equal chance* for the happening or the failure of any one of the specified particulars ; then (*l*) the probability *against* the occurrence of all the particulars in *any* way, is that of the 50th power of 2 to unity ; that is, the probability is greater than

1125900000000000 to 1,

or greater than *eleven hundred and twenty-five millions of millions to one*, that all these circumstances do not turn up, even at distinct periods. This computation, however, is independent of the consideration of *time*. Let it then be recollectèd farther, that if any one of the specified circumstances happen, it

(*l*) Emerson on Chances, prop. 3. Wood's Algebra, art. 449.  
Chances.

*may* be the day after the delivery of the prophecy, or at any period from that time to the end of the world; this will so indefinitely augment the probability against the contemporaneous occurrence of merely these *fifty* circumstances, that it surpasses the powers of numbers to express correctly the immense improbability of its taking place. Be it remembered also, that in this calculation I have assumed the hypothesis *most* favourable to the adversaries of prophecy, and the most unfavourable possible to the well-being of the world, and the happiness of its inhabitants; namely, the hypothesis that every thing is fortuitous; —and it will be seen how my argument is strengthened by restoring things to their proper state. If every thing were left to blind chance, it appears that the probability against the fulfilment of only fifty independent predictions, would be too great to be expressed numerically: how much greater, then, must it be in fact, when all events are under the control of a Being of matchless wisdom, power, and goodness, who hates fraud and deception, who must especially hate it when attempted under his name and authority, who knows all that occurs in all places, and who can dissipate with “the breath of his mouth,” every deceiver, and all their delusions? The more we know of the prophecies, and of history, whether sacred or profane, the more we are struck with the correspondence of predictions and

events ; their coincidence in hundreds of instances is so palpably notorious, that none can deny it : every principle of reason, every result of correct computation, instituted with a view to this inquiry, is in favour of the positions maintained by Christians in all ages. Imagine these to be still doubtful, and what is there else that is stable and certain ?

————— “ If these fail

“ The pillar'd firmament is rottenness,

“ And earth's base built on stubble.” MILTON.

But a person who wished to reason in favour of the truth of the Christian Religion, from prophecy, need not take this wide field of argument. There are many small portions in some of the prophetic writings, on either of which he may safely make his stand. He may take, for example, either the ninth, thirteenth and fourteenth, forty-fifth, or fifty-third chapters of Isaiah, and challenge any one to account satisfactorily for the exact correspondence of the prediction and the history, except he admit that the prophet was inspired by God to foretel the events. Suppose we fix upon the fifty-third chapter. So striking are its contents, and so exactly were they verified in the life and sufferings of Jesus Christ, that there have not been wanting modern Deists to affirm that it was actually composed *after* the Christian æra. This calumny, however, needs no laboured

refutation. The Septuagint version is well known, as I remarked in a preceding letter, to have been undertaken nearly 300 years before Christ ; and that version, according to the testimony of one who saw the original, contained the prophecies of Isaiah. Besides, it is an incontrovertible fact, that the Jews in all ages, from the delivery of these prophecies to the present, admitted Isaiah to be taught of God. The later rabbins, it is true, to avoid the conclusions which Christians deduce from Isaiah, and especially the chapter last specified, have invented a distinction of a double Messiah, “one who was to redeem us, “and another who was to suffer for us ; for they say, “that there are two several persons promised under “the name of the Messiah ; one of the tribe of “*Ephraim*, the other of the tribe of *Judah*; one the “son of *Joseph*, the other the son of *David* ; the “one to precede, fight, and suffer death ; the other “to follow, conquer, reign, and never die.” (m) But Bishop Pearson proves that this distinction is false and novel ; and, farther, that the rabbins who preceded Jesus Christ, understood the chapter, of which we are now speaking, to be a prediction of the Messiah, and of him alone.

Origen, indeed, informs us, (n) that in his time

(m) Pearson on the Creed, p. 185.

(n) Orig. contra Celsum, lib. 1.

the Jews took another way to evade the difficulties in which the consideration of this chapter placed them. They argued, that the prophecy did not relate to one man, but to one people, *the Jews*, who were smitten of God, and dispersed among the gentiles for their conversion. But, to show the absurdity of this interpretation, he pressed them with this sentence from the Septuagint; ἀπὸ τῶν αὐομισῶν τε λαβ με ηχθί εἰς θανάτον; and the argument was so decisive, they could not withstand it. This proves not only the truth of the received interpretation of this famous prophecy, but, farther, that the Hebrew text of that time read agreeably to the εἰς θανάτον of the Septuagint; otherwise, the Jews, by quoting their own text (Isai. liii. 8), and showing that it did not mean “smitten to death,” would have reprobed the Greek version, and triumphed over the Christian advocate.

Nor has this remarkable portion of prophecy been successful merely in puzzling and silencing the Jews. It has, under the divine blessing, been instrumental in converting unbelievers, in every age of the church. There has occurred a signal instance in modern times, namely, that of the celebrated John Wilmott, Earl of Rochester, a man, “whom the muses were fond to inspire and ashamed to avow,” who lived the life of a libertine and Atheist; but who, agree-

ably to the testimony of Bishop Burnet, died the death "of a penitent Christian." The perusal of this chapter, the meditation upon its complete fulfilment, and upon the beautiful summary it contains of the most peculiar and distinguishing doctrines of Christianity, so operated on the mind of this profligate, though able man, as to lead (in the opinion of the prelate just mentioned) to an unfeigned faith in him "who was wounded for *his* transgressions, and by "whose stripes *he* was healed."

Such then, my friend, being the cogency of the evidence resulting from prophecy, let us not attempt to resist it; such the purity and heavenly tendency of the precepts and doctrines often blended with the predictions, let us yield ourselves to their influence. Let us gather food for meditation from the animating language of those who

" th' inspiring breath  
" Ecstatic felt ; and, from this world retir'd,  
" Convers'd with angels and immortal forms  
" On gracious errands bent :"                           THOMSON.

Let us implant the delightful anticipations of faith, upon the triumphant declarations of prophecy, and hail that happy period foretold by Isaiah, when

" Every valley shall be exalted, and every moun-  
tain and hill be brought low ;

“ And the crooked shall become straight, and the  
“ rough places a smooth plain ;  
“ And the glory of JEHOVAH shall be revealed ;  
“ And *all flesh* shall see together the salvation of  
“ our God.”

Infidelity, every where active, though always baffled, will suggest the improbability of the completion of the prophecies yet unfulfilled : but when it is considered that many of the predictions, long ago realized, were delivered at the same time, and by the same prophet, as those for whose accomplishment we are waiting, it would be the height of absurdity and impiety to encourage a doubt. It may happen naturally enough, that the true meaning of a prediction may be disguised, in order that the wayward wills of men may not operate for its prevention ; but this is no reason for its rejection. Prophecies are like writings in cypher, which require either tutors or events to explain their hidden meaning, and render them natural and intelligible. This, with regard to the Old Testament predictions, “ is what Jesus Christ and his Apostles have done. They have opened the seal, they have rent the veil, and developed the spiritual sense. They have taught us, that our enemies are our passions, that our Redeemer is a *spiritual* Redeemer ; that he is to have

" a first and a second coming, the one in humility  
" to abase the proud, the other in glory to exalt the  
" humble ; that Jesus Christ is God, as well as  
" man." (o)

I am &c.

(o) Pascal's Thoughts : " The Law figurative."

## LETTER VII.

*On the Evidence deducible from Miracles; and on  
the Credibility of Human Testimony.*

THE advocates of Revealed Religion affirm, without any fear of refutation, that the argument resulting from the completion of Prophecy is one that is continually increasing in force; while they are in general as ready to admit, that the argument from Miracles diminishes in proportion as we recede farther from the Apostolic times. I hope, my friend, to be able to convince you, in the course of the present letter, that this is a concession which need not be made: but that *we* have as good reason to believe the miraculous facts of Scripture, as any except eye-witnesses, or those who received their information immediately from the lips of eye-witnesses.

The evidence flowing from the performance of miracles is indeed so summary and convincing, that it may be stated satisfactorily in very few words: for this reason, however, as it should seem, it has been selected by ingenious unbelievers to exercise their dexterity and acumen upon; and thus it becomes requisite to discuss this branch of our subject with a

minuteness and comparative prolixity which might, otherwise, have been altogether avoided.

By *miracles*, I do not mean "juggling tricks," but supernatural events. This genuine notion of miracles has been sometimes obscured by definition; yet a candid inquirer after truth cannot well mistake. Most of the opinions entertained by men of good sense, apart from any controversial views as to this topic, are correct. No man would think that curing lameness, by a regular surgical or medical process, was miraculous: *every* man would say that the instantaneous production of a limb, and "making the maimed whole," was miraculous. And this exactly reaches the logical scientific notion of miracles: for, "when such effects are produced as (*cæteris paribus*) are usually produced, God is said to operate according to the common course of nature: but when such effects are produced as are (*cæteris paribus*) contrary to, or different from, that common course, they are said to be MIRACULOUS."

Now no man will presume to affirm that it is impossible a teacher should be sent from God. It may be *necessary* that one should be sent; and I think the train of observation and deduction of facts in my second and third letter, establish that necessity. If one or more be sent, they must bring credentials to evince that their mission is divine; and what can those credentials be but *miracles*? In fact,

the very idea of a revelation includes that of miracles. A revelation *cannot* be made but by a miraculous interposition of Deity : so that the probability of a revelation implies a corresponding probability of the occurrence of miracles ; and the necessity of a revelation a like necessity of miracles. Nay, I may venture to affirm farther, that there is a mutual and necessary correlation between the two : for as, on the one hand, miracles (or prophecies, which are in fact miraculous, being contrary to the course of nature) are necessary to prove the divine authority of an agent ; so, on the other hand, the performance of uncontrolled miracles, or the delivery of true predictions, immediately suggests to the mind the conviction that they have been permitted solely for the purpose of proving that the person, by whom they are performed, is employed by God to do something, or reveal something, which mankind would not have known in any other way.

It is, one would suppose, almost an intuitive truth, that when a person performs evident and *uncontrolled* miracles in proof of any doctrine, those, who have sufficient evidence of the reality of such miracles, ought to admit the doctrine to be true, or from God. At all events the proposition is easily deduced from a few steps of obvious reasoning ; guarding it, as I have done, after the manner of Barrow and Chandler, to *uncontrolled* miracles, or those the ap-

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parent design of which is not contradicted either by the *absurdity* of the thing they are intended to prove, or by some equal or greater miracles opposed to them. We thus exclude every thing like juggling from the idea of miracles; and at the same time free ourselves from all consideration of pretended miracles, such as those performed by the Egyptian magicians, with the permission or the performance of which, as they were *controlled*, we have nothing to do. The reasoning from which our proposition flows is simply this. A genuine miracle cannot be performed without an extraordinary divine interposition, either mediate, or immediate. If the Supreme Being would confirm the truth of a proposition to one man, by the testimony of another to whom it was immediately revealed, we can conceive no method by which he could do it so effectually, as by conferring on him power to work a miracle in confirmation of it. When a miracle is *uncontrolled*, we can conjecture no particular by which it can be distinguished from a miracle wrought to confirm a truth. If God were to suffer an uncontrolled miracle to be wrought in confirmation of a falsehood, there would seem to be no criterion by which his testimony could be distinguished. It is inconsistent with the *wisdom* and *goodness* of God, to suffer an *uncontrolled* miracle to be wrought to establish a falsehood, since it would leave his creatures in a perpetual uncer-

tainty, and an uncertainty that would be most painful to the most *virtuous*, who have always most wished for a revelation. Since, therefore, God is both wise and good, it follows that a proposition attested by uncontrolled miracles is attested by him, and is of necessity true.

From this reasoning it is natural to expect, that in the Scripture History there should be recorded many miracles ; and thus, on examining the sacred volume, are our expectations realized. The faith of Moses was confirmed by the miracle of the burning, yet unconsumed, bush. Moses convinced the children of Israel that God employed him to lead them out of Egypt, by performing miracles by means of his rod : he appealed to similar miracles before Pharaoh: for the same purpose : the passage through the Red-Sea, which opened to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians, who were afterwards swallowed up in the collapsing waters, was miraculous : the passage of the river Jordan under Joshua, the standing still of the sun and moon at his command, and the falling of the walls of Jericho were miraculous : the sacrifice kindled by fire from heaven ; the raising of the Shunamite's and of the widow of Sarepta's sons, and the translation of Elijah, are events of the same class ; and so are those recorded in Daniel, respecting the fiery furnace and the den of lions. From the numerous New Testament miracles, beginning

with that wrought at the marriage at Cana, I cannot attempt to make an adequate selection. Though it may be proper to remark, that those performed by Jesus Christ differed essentially from others: Moses could not work miracles without his rod; the Apostles performed theirs, for the most part expressly, and always *virtually*, "in the name of Jesus Christ" "of Nazareth;" the Messiah exerted miraculous power from *himself*, without any reference to another. And, farther, the miracles of Jesus Christ were uniformly benevolent:—he cured the sick,—he healed the lame, he made the maimed whole,—he made the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the dumb to speak,—he raised the dead,—and finally he raised *himself*. So numerous, indeed, and so beneficial were his miracles, that "the multitudes were astonished, saying, it was never seen so in Israel;" and well might their astonishment be excited, as our Lord wrought more benevolent miracles in one afternoon, (o) than had been performed by any of the prophets in all their lives.

That one great object, kept in view by Christ and his Apostles in performing miracles, was to furnish awaking and convincing proofs of their divine mission, is evident from the uniform tenor of the New Testament Histories. The language of the Jewish

(o) See Matt. ix. 18—34.

Ruler was the pure unadulterated language of common sense, the force of which all the sophistry in the world cannot weaken. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." (p) The Chief Priests and the Pharisees had the same conviction; for, said they, after Lazarus was raised from the dead, "This man doeth many miracles: if we let him alone, all will believe on him." (q) Jesus Christ himself appeals to his miracles. "I have greater witness (says he) than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." (r) And again, when the Jews asked him, "If thou be the Christ tell us plainly. How long dost thou make us to doubt? Jesus answered them, "The works that I do, they bear witness of me. If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know, and believe that the Father is in me and I in him." "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin." (s) And on another occasion, when John sent his disciples to Christ to ask, "Art thou He that should come, or do we

(p) John iii. 2. (q) John xi. 47, 48. (r) John v. 36.

(s) John x. 24, 25, 37, 38. xv. 24.

"look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." (*t*) In like manner, with regard to the Apostles, "God also bare them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." (*v*)

Consistently with this, the early Christian writers and Apologists, in all those cases where they do not assume the *history* as true, and thence argue that Jesus ought to be received as the Messiah, appeal in very express terms to his miracles. Thus, QUADRATUS appeals very strongly to those miracles. JUSTIN MARTYR asserts the performance of miracles by Jesus in as forcible words as language will admit, and assigns the reason why he rather had recourse to the argument from *prophecy*, than that from *miracles*, viz. that his opponents would ascribe the latter to magic. IRENÆUS, LACTANTIUS, TERTULLIAN, ORIGEN, and JEROME, speak of Christ's miracles, and notice the same evasion on the part of the adversaries to Christianity.

It is highly worthy of remark too, that none of

(*t*) Matt. xi. 3, 4, 5.

(*v*) Heb. ii. 4. See also Acts xiv. 3. x. 38, 39, &c.

the *early* opposers of the religion of Jesus, pretend to dispute that he performed miracles. LUCIAN, JULIAN, PORPHYRY, HYPATIUS, CELSUS, &c. admit that miracles were wrought. Julian, it is true, endeavours to make light of them, and wonders that so much stir should be made about a person, who merely “opened the eyes of the blind, restored ‘limbs to the lame, and delivered persons possessed.” Celsus again ridicules the miracles, but never disputes that they occurred. Now who can suppose, for a moment, that so violent an opposer of Christianity would have admitted the miracles of Christ as real facts, had he not been compelled to it by the universal consent of all inquiring men of the age in which he lived?

I expect to be charged with credulity; but I shall, notwithstanding, go still farther, and press another unwilling evidence into the service of Christ. I now refer to the remarkable passage of Josephus,(w) in which a most plain and express reference is made, not only to the Life, miracles, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but also to his resurrection, the fulfilling of prophecies in him, and the wonderful conversion both of Jews and Gentiles to the Christian faith.(x)

(w) Antiq. Judaic. lib. xviii. cap. iv. p. 621. ed. Genev. 1635.

(x) I cannot here enter at large into the question of the genuineness or the spuriousness of this celebrated passage, but shall

Nor, indeed, is Josephus the only Jewish writer who allows of the miracles of Christ; they are ad-

only state very briefly the reasons which have induced me to believe it genuine.

1st. The testimony is recorded, and taken notice of, as Josephus's, by several early writers of unquestionable credit: As, Eusebius, Demon. Evan. lib. iii., and Histor. Ecclesiast. lib. i. cap. 11. Nicephorus Callistus, Histor. Eccles. lib. i. cap. 39. Zozomen, Histor. Eccles. lib. i. Suidas has it also under the word Ἰωάννης, referring to the 18th book of Josephus's Antiquities for it. Jerome, in his work De Scriptor. Ecclesiast. makes a like reference. And it is repeated by Isidorus Pelusiota, lib. iv. epist. 225. From which it is evident, that the passage was in the copies of Josephus used by these writers, and that they had no doubts of its genuineness.

2dly. There are fewer difficulties attending the supposition, that this testimony was some time or other struck out of various copies by Jews, through their enmity to Christianity, than the one that it was ever deceitfully foisted into any by the Christians.

3dly. It is at least as easy to answer that question (which some lay so much stress upon), viz. Why should those copies of Josephus, which Origen, &c. made use of, want the testimony concerning Christ, and have that relating to James, to whose unjust murder the Jewish historian ascribes the destruction of Jerusalem; when the majority of our copies want that concerning James, yet have that relating to Jesus Christ?—as it is to answer the following question:—

Why should so many credible writers (who do not appear to have taken the matter upon trust from one another, and some of whom must necessarily have exposed the cause they defended to the last degree of insult and contempt, by asserting a thing in

mitted expressly and openly in the books of the TAL-MUD, under the title *Aboda Zara*.

Thus it appears, that we have the most marked and direct testimony of the friends of Revealed Religion (those, too, who had been converted from heathenism by the weight of its evidence), and the concessions of its enemies, both Gentiles and Jews, in favour of those miracles, which were performed in order to prove that the religion came from God; and this testimony, and these concessions, were delivered so near the period in which the miracles were supposed to have been wrought, that they cannot be accounted for in any other way than by admitting that both Christians and unbelievers, in the early ages, were convinced that something which required more than human energy had occurred. Why, then, should this be disputed in these remote ages?

Voltaire and Mr. Hume will answer the question, by telling us in effect, though not in express words, "that since miracles are not wrought now, they never were wrought at all."

The substance of Mr. Hume's argument (which I describe, because almost all later Deists have echoed

which all mankind could have confuted them) all agree in appealing to an author, and that in the most particular manner possible, for such a remarkable and decisive passage, if they had not actually found those words in the writings of this author, which they so unequivocally quote as his?

(As sentiments) is this. "Experience, which in some things is variable, in others is uniform, is our *only* guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact. Variable experience gives rise to probability only; an uniform experience amounts to proof. Our belief of any fact, from the testimony of eye-witnesses, is derived from no other principle than our experience of the veracity of human testimony. If the fact attested be miraculous, there arises a contest of two opposite experiences, or proof against proof. Now, a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as complete as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined; and if so, it is an undeniable consequence, that it cannot be surmounted by any proof whatever derived from human testimony." (y)

Now, to this reasoning, or the most prominent and essential parts of it, several decisive answers have been, or may be, given. A few of these may properly find a place here.

I. Doctor Campbell, in his celebrated "Dissertation on Miracles," shows the fallacy of Mr. Hume's argument thus: "The evidence arising from human testimony is *not solely* derived from experience:

(y) *Encyclopædia Britannica*, art. *Abridgement*.

on the contrary, testimony has a natural influence on belief, antecedent to experience. The early and unlimited assent given to testimony by children, gradually contracts as they advance in life: it is, therefore, more consonant to truth to say, that our *difference* in testimony is the result of experience, than that our *faith* in it has this foundation. Besides, the uniformity of experience in favour of any fact is not a proof against its being reversed in a particular instance. The evidence arising from the single testimony of a man of known veracity will go farther to establish a belief of its being actually reversed. If his testimony be confirmed by a few others of the same character, we *cannot* withhold our assent to the truth of it. Now, though the operations of nature are governed by uniform laws, and though we have not the testimony of our senses in favour of any *violation* of them; still if, in particular instances, we have the testimony of thousands of our fellow-creatures, and those, too, men of strict integrity, swayed by no motives of ambition or interest, and governed by the principles of common sense, that they were actually witnesses of these violations, the constitution of our nature obliges us to believe them." (y)

II. Mr. Hume's reasoning is founded upon too limited a view of the laws and course of nature. If

(y) Encyclopædia Britannica, art. *Abridgement*.

we consider things duly, we shall find that lifeless matter is utterly incapable of obeying any laws, or of being endued with any powers : and, therefore, what is usually called *the course of nature* can be nothing else than the arbitrary will and pleasure of God, acting continually upon matter according to certain rules of uniformity, still bearing a relation to contingencies. So that it is as easy for the Supreme Being to alter what men think the course of nature, as to preserve it. Those effects, which are produced in the world regularly and indesinently, and which are usually termed the works of nature, prove the constant Providence of the Deity ; those, on the contrary, which, upon any extraordinary occasion, are produced in such a manner as it is manifest could not have been either by human power, or by what is called chance, prove undeniably the immediate interposition of the Deity on that especial occasion. God, it must be recollectcd, is the governor of the moral as well as of the *physical* world ; and, since the moral well-being of the universe is of more consequence than its physical order and regularity, it follows, obviously, that the laws, conformably with which the material world seems generally to be regulated, are subservient, and may occasionally yield, to the laws by which the moral world is governed. Although, therefore, a miracle is contrary to the usual *course of nature* (and would indeed lose its benefi-

cial effect, if it were not so), it cannot thence be inferred that it is "a violation of the *laws* of nature," allowing the term to include a regard to moral tendencies. The laws by which a wise and holy God governs the world, cannot, unless he is pleased to reveal them, be learnt in any other way than from *testimony*; since, on this supposition, nothing but testimony can bring us acquainted with the whole series of his dispensations, and this kind of knowledge is absolutely necessary previously to our correctly inferring those laws. Testimony, therefore, must be admitted as constituting the principal means of discovering the real laws by which the universe has been regulated; that testimony assures us, that the *apparent* course of nature has often been interrupted to produce important moral effects; and we must not at random disregard such testimony, because, in estimating its credibility, we ought to look almost infinitely more at the moral, than at the physical, circumstances connected with any particular event. (z)

III. But the defence of miracles against the objections of infidels, need not be thrown wholly upon these general and abstract reasonings, satisfactory and cogent as they are. The miracles recorded in Scrip-

(z) This argument is pursued to a considerable extent by Professor Vince, in his "Sermons on the Credibility of Miracles, preached before the University of Cambridge."

ture, and especially those performed by Moses, by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, are accompanied by evidence such as you will find it difficult to adduce in support of any other historic fact, and such as cannot possibly be brought in support of any pretended fact whatever; evidence, such as the pretended miracles of Mahometanism, and those of the Romish church, are totally destitute of.

The truth of a matter of fact may be positively inferred and known, if it be attended by certain criteria, such as no pretended fact can possibly have. These criteria are at least *four*. It is required, first, that the fact be a *sensible* fact, such as men's outward senses can judge of: secondly, that it be *notorious*, performed publicly in the presence of witnesses: thirdly, that there be *memorials* of it, or monuments, actions, and customs, kept up in commemoration of it: fourthly, that such monuments and actions commence with the fact. (x) There may be facts in fa-

(a) These criteria were first proposed as decisive in favour of the Scripture miracles, about 1697, by Mr. Charles Leslie, in his admirable and unanswerable book, "A Short and Easy Method with the Deists," (from <sup>which</sup> work I select the instances given in this section), and by the Abbé St. Rcal. It is of no consequence to the argument, to determine whether these authors invented it independently of each other, or borrowed it one from the other: but it is important to remark, on the authority of the late very able Mr. Jones, of Nayland, that Dr. Conyers Middleton, feeling how necessary it was to his principles that he

vour of which these four marks cannot be produced ; but the argument of Leslie and St. Real is, that whatever has all these four marks *cannot* be false.

For example, could Moses have persuaded six hundred thousand men that he had led them through the Red Sea in the manner related in Exodus, or have instituted the passover in commemoration of the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, if these circumstances had never occurred ? Could he make the Israelites *fancy* that they were fed miraculously with manna forty years in the wilderness, or that, during all that period, their " raiment waxed not old, " neither did their feet swell," (b) unless those things, however extraordinary, were facts ? Here our four criteria apply. The first two secure from any cheat, or imposture, at the time the facts occurred, and the last two preserve equally against any imposition in after ages ; because the authors of the book in which these facts are related, speak of it as written at that time by the actors or eye-witnesses, and as commanded by God to be carefully kept and preserved

should find some way of getting over Mr. Leslie's argument, looked out assiduously, for twenty years together, to find some pretended fact to which these four criteria could be applied, but *without success*. Dr. Middleton died a Deist notwithstanding ! Alas ! is this the conduct of one who professed to yield to *nothing but reason* ? or of one, who, through some strange fatuity, " loved darkness rather than light ?"

(b) Deut. viii. 4. xxix. 5.

to all generations, and read publicly to all the people at stated times. (c) And farther, the institutions appointed in this book were to be perpetually observed, from the day of each institution for ever among these people, in memory of the miraculous facts. Now, suppose this book to have been forged a hundred or a thousand years after the time of Moses; would not every one say when it first appeared, "We never heard of this book before; we know of no such institutions, as of a passover, or circumcision, or of sabbaths, and the many feasts and fasts therein appointed; we know nothing of a tribe of Levi, or of a tabernacle in which they were to serve in such an order of priesthood: this book must be an arrant forgery, for it is destitute of all those marks which it gives of itself, as to its own continuance, and of those institutions which it relates." No instance can be shown, since the world began, of any book so substantiated that was a forgery, and yet passed as truth upon any people.

Mr. Leslie, however, does not stop here, but adds a fifth mark as peculiar to our Bible, distinguishing it from all other histories, relating facts that formerly occurred: this is, that the book, in which the facts are related, contains likewise the *law* of that people to whom it belongs, and is their statute book by

(c) *Exod. xxxi. 10, 11, 12.* *Josh. viii. 34, 35.* *Neh. viii.*

which their causes are determined. This will render it impossible for any one to coin or forge such a book, so as to make it pass as authentic among any people. If, for example, a person should forge a statute book for England, and publish it next term, could he make all the judges, lawyers, and people believe that this was their genuine and only statute book by which their causes had been determined for centuries past? They must forget their old statute-book, and believe that this new book, which they never saw or heard of before, was the very book which had been referred to in the pleadings in Westminster-hall for so many ages, which had been so often printed, and of which the originals are now kept in the Tower, to be consulted as there is occasion. Thus it is that the books of Moses contain not only the history of the Jews, but also their municipal law, as well civil as ecclesiastical: and thus, also, it is with respect to the New Testament, which is the spiritual and ecclesiastical law to the Christian Church in all nations; and which cannot therefore be corrupted, unless all persons, in all nations whithersoever Christianity is spread, should conspire in the corruption of the Gospel.

Mr. Leslie selects some striking, though familiar, examples in illustration of his general argument: among others, he adverts to the *Stonehenge* on Salisbury-plain, and compares it with the stones set up

at *Gilgal*. Every one, as he observes, knows this Stonehenge; or has heard of it; and yet none knows the reason why those great stones were set there, or by whom, or in memory of what. Now, suppose a person should publish a book to-morrow, and therein affirm that these stones were set up by Hercules, Polyphemus, or Garagantua, in memory of such and such of their actions; if he merely make the affirmation, some few may *perhaps* give him credit. But if, for farther confirmation of his assertion, he should say in this book, that it was written at the time when such actions were performed, and by the very actors themselves, or by eye-witnesses: and that this book had been received as true, and quoted by authors of the greatest reputation in all ages since: moreover, that this book was well known in England, and enjoined by act of parliament to be taught our children; and that in consequence we *did* teach it our children, and had been taught it ourselves when we were children: it would seem impertinent to ask any Deist whether he thinks such a delusion could be passed upon the people of England.

Let us now compare this with the Stonehenge, as we may call it, or twelve great stones set up at *Gilgal*; and erected in order that when the children of the Israelites in after ages should inquire the meaning of it, it should be told them. (d) The occurrence,

(d) *Josh.* iv. 6.

in commemoration of which these stones at Gilgal were set up, is as wonderful and miraculous as the passage of the Israelites through the Red sea, and free from the puerile carpings which have been raised by unbelievers against that remarkable event. Notice of this miraculous passage over the Jordan at Gilgal was given to the people on the preceding day (e). It took place at noon-day, before the *whole nation*. And when the waters of Jordan were divided, it was not at any low ebb, but at the time when that river overflowed all its banks. (f) It was effected, too, not by winds, or in length of time, which winds would require to accomplish it; but all on the sudden, as soon as the "feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, then the waters which came from above stood, and rose up upon an heap: and they that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt-sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were

(e) Josh. iii. 5.

(f) Josh. iii. 15.

“lift up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan  
“returned unto their place, and flowed over all his  
“banks as they did before. And the people came  
“out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month,  
“and encamped in Gilgal, in the east-border of Je-  
“rusalem. And these twelve stones, which the twelve  
“men (from every tribe a man) took out of the midst  
“of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he  
“spake unto the children of Israel, saying, when your  
“children shall ask their fathers in time to come,  
“saying, What mean these stones ? Then ye shall let  
“your children know, saying, Israel came over this  
“Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried  
“up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye  
“were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the  
“Red Sea, which he dried up from before us until we  
“were gone over : that all the people of the earth  
“might know the hand of the Lord, that it is  
“mighty : that ye might fear the Lord your God  
“for ever.” (g)

Now, to frame our argument, let it be supposed that there never was any such occurrence as that passage over Jordan ; that these stones at Gilgal were set up on some other occasion, in some after age ; and then that some designing man invented this book of Joshua, and pretended that it was written by Jo-

(g) Josh. iii. 15, 16, 17. iv. 18—24.

shua at this time; adducing this erection of stones at Gilgal as a testimony of the truth of it. Would not the Israelites say to him, "We know the stonage at Gilgal, but we never before heard this reason assigned for it: nor of this book of Joshua. Where has it been all this while? and where, and how came you, after so many ages, to find it? Besides, we are told in this book, that this same passage over Jordan was ordained to be taught our children, from age to age; and therefore that they were always to be instructed in the meaning of that stonage at Gilgal, as a memorial of it. But we were never taught it when we were children; nor did we ever teach our children any such thing. And it is not at all likely *that* could have been forgotten, while so remarkable a stonage continued, which was set up for that and no other purpose."

If then, for the reasons before assigned, no such imposition could be practised successfully upon us as to the Stone-henge upon Salisbury plain, how much less could it be with regard to the erection at Gilgal?

And farther, if, when we know not the reason of an insulated monument, such a delusive reason cannot be imposed; how much more impossible is it to impose on us in actions and observances which we celebrate in memory of particular miraculous events? How impossible to make us forget those passages which we

daily commemorate; and to persuade us that we had always observed such institutions or ceremonies in memory of what we never before heard of; that is, that we knew it before we knew it! And if it be found thus impossible to practise an imposition upon us, even in some things which have not all the four criteria beforementioned; how much more impossible is it that there should be any deceit with regard to particulars in which all those criteria actually meet!

Similar reasoning is applied with equal success by this acute writer to the principal facts, including the miraculous ones recorded in the evangelical history. The works and the miracles of Jesus Christ are said, by the evangelists, to be done *publicly* in the face of the world; and so, indeed, himself affirmed in reasoning with his accusers: "I spake *openly* to the world, and in secret have I said nothing."(h) We learn also in the Acts of the Apostles, that three thousand at one time, and more than two thousand at another, (i) were converted, upon conviction of what themselves had seen and known, what had been done publicly before their eyes, and in particulars, respecting which it was impossible to impose upon them. So that here we find the two first of Mr. Leslie's criteria.

(h) John xviii. 20.

(i) Acts ii. 41. ix. 4.

Then for the two second: Baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted as perpetual memorials of these things: they were not instituted in after ages, but at the very time when the circumstances to which they relate took place; and they have been observed without interruption, through the whole Christian world, in all ages down from that time to the present. Besides,—Christ himself ordained apostles, and other ministers of his gospel, to preach and administer the sacraments: and that *always* “even unto the end of the world.” (k) Accordingly, they have continued by regular succession to this day. So that the Christian ministry is, and always has been, as notorious in point of fact, as the tribe of Levi among the Jews. The gospel also is as much a law, a rule of conduct to the Christians, as the books of Moses to the Jews: and it being part of the matters of fact or truths related in the Gospel that “pastors and teachers” (l) were appointed by Christ, and to continue until the end of the world; consequently, if the Gospel history and doctrines were invented (as they must be, if forged at all) in some ages after Christ; then, at the time of the invention, there could be no such order of clergy or ministers as derived themselves from the institution of Christ; a circumstance which must give the lie to the Gospel, and demonstrate that

(k) Matthew xxviii. 20.

(l) Ephes. iv. 11.

whole to be false. The miraculous actions of Christ and his Apostles being affirmed to be true no otherwise than as there was at that identical time (whenever the Deists will suppose the Gospel History to be forged), not only sacraments or ordinances of Christ's institution, but an order of Christian pastors, &c. to administer them; and it being impossible there could be any such things before they were invented, it is as impossible they should be received and accredited when invented. Hence it follows that it was as impossible to have imposed these miraculous relations upon mankind in after ages, as it would have been to make persons believe they saw the miracles, or were parties concerned in the beneficial effects resulting from them, if they were not.

IV. Notwithstanding all that has been said, however, by Leslie and others, since there is no making a fence high enough to keep out extravagant conjectures and surmises, we find unbelievers exclaiming after all, that still men's senses might be imposed upon. To reasoning we may always oppose reasoning; and it is often perfectly legitimate to oppose conjecture to conjecture; yet, with regard to the New Testament miracles, we cannot have so ill an opinion of the intellects of infidels as to conjecture that they really believe,

“ That persons afflicted with the most excruciating maladies and diseases, should be juggled into perfect

ease and health, and cured (as Celsus pretended) by Legerdemain :

“ That blind men should see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, lepers be cleansed, and dead men come to life, merely by the play of fancy, and force of imagination :

“ That the senses of whole multitudes should be imposed upon to such a degree that they should all fancy together, they saw, heard, spake, ate, and drank, repeated these actions many times over, and that in different places and circumstances too, and yet after all did nothing of all this; but were either asleep, or in extacy, or under the influence of some strange charm all the while :

“ That five thousand men, for example, at one time, and four thousand at another (besides women and children), should persuade themselves they fed only upon a few loaves and fishes; should publish it to all the country that they did so; refer to time, place, and persons present; and yet, instead of this, have been in fact at a splendid and magnificent feast, where plenty and variety of all provisions, fit to entertain such multitudes, were set before them.”

If these things may be, of what utility are our senses? What dependance can be placed upon them? or what credit can be due to a deist who attests nothing but upon *experience*, and yet admits that *thousands* together may be deceived in reference to some

of the most common and frequent actions and functions in human life?

In truth, there are but four hypotheses that can be assumed with respect to the miracles of Jesus Christ, one or other of which a reasonable being must adopt:

Either, first, the recorded accounts of those miracles were absolute fictions, wickedly invented by some who had a wish to impose upon mankind:

Or, secondly, Jesus Christ did not work any true miracles; but the senses of the people were in some way or other deluded, so that they believed he really did perform miracles when in fact he did not:

Or, thirdly, that the spectators were not in any way deluded, but knew very well he wrought no miracles; yet were all (both enemies and friends, the Jews themselves not excepted, though they daily "sought occasions against him") united in a close confederacy to persuade the world that he performed the most surprising things. So that while some actively circulated reports of these amazing occurrences, the rest kept their counsel, never offering to unmask the fraud, but managing the matter with so much cunning and dexterity, and such an exact mutual harmony and correspondence, that the story of Jesus Christ's performing miracles should become current, should obtain almost universal credit, and *not a single person be able to disprove it*:

Or, fourthly, that he did actually perform these astonishing works, and that the accounts given of them by the Christian writers in the New Testament are authentic and correct.

He that does not adopt the last of these conclusions, will find it a matter of very small consequence which of the three others he chooses. For, that the stories cannot be *fictions* is evident from the reasoning of Leslie already adduced: and it will be seen further, from a few moment's consideration, that the denial of the miracles of Jesus Christ, in any way, leads necessarily to the admission of a series of real miracles of another kind.

The progress of the human mind, as may be seen by all the inquiries into it, is a thing of a determinate nature: a man's thoughts, words, and actions, are all generated by something previous; there is an established course for these things (as well as for the physical part of the universe), an analogy, of which every man is a judge from what he feels in himself, and observes in others; and to suppose any number of men in determinate circumstances to vary from this general tenor of human nature in like circumstances, is a miracle, and may, as Dr. Hartley remarks, be made a miracle of any magnitude, i. e. incredible to any degree by augmenting the number and magnitude of the deviations. It is, therefore, a miracle in the human *mind*, as great as any that can possibly be

conceived to take place with regard to the body, to suppose that multitudes of Christians, Jews, and Heathens, in the primitive times, should have borne such unquestionable testimony, some expressly, others by indirect circumstances, as we learn from history, they did, to the miracles said to be performed by Christ upon the human body, unless they were really performed. In like manner, the reception which the miracles recorded in the Old Testament met with, is a miracle, unless those miracles were true. These are not, however, the only miracles which unbelievers in the Scripture miracles must admit. The very determination of the apostles to propagate the belief of false miracles (independent of the additional difficulty arising from the silent concurrence of Jews and Gentiles in the story, according to the third hypothesis suggested above), in support of such a religion as that taught in the New Testament, is as great a miracle as human imagination can conceive. For when they formed this design, whether they hoped to succeed, or conjectured that they should fail in their undertaking, they chose what they knew to be *moral evil*, with the contingency of experiencing *natural evil*; nay, so desirous were they to obtain nothing but *misery*, that they made their own persecution a test of the truth of their doctrines;—thus violating the strongest possible of

all laws of human nature, namely, that “ no man can choose evil for its *own sake*.”

Here then an unbeliever must either deny all analogy, association, uniformity of action, operation of motives, selection of good in preference to evil, &c. and become an absolute sceptic in the most extensive acceptation of the term, or acknowledge that very strong physical analogies may sometimes be violated; that is, he must have recourse to something miraculous in order that he may get quit of something miraculous. Let him next inquire, which of the two opposite classes of miracles will agree best with his other notions: whether it be more analogous to the nature of God, the course of providence, the history of the world, the known progress of man in this life, &c. to allow that God imparted to certain select persons, of eminent piety, the power of working miracles; or to suppose that he confounded the understandings, affections, and whole train of associations of thousands of persons, nay, of entire nations, in such a manner that men, who in all other things seem to have acted like other men, should, in respect of the history of Jesus Christ, the prophets, or the apostles, abandon all established rules of thinking and acting, and conduct themselves in a matter miraculously repugnant to all our ideas and all our experience. In order to determine this inquiry, let it not

be forgotten that the object of the class of miracles against which the Deists contend is *worthy* of a God of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness : while the object of the latter is decidedly and absolutely inconsistent with wisdom and goodness, attributes which all theists ascribe to that Great Being by whom alone miracles can be performed, allowing that they can be wrought at all.

V. Much of the preceding reasoning is entirely independent of any minute investigation of the nature of concurrent or successive testimony ; and the whole discussion might safely be terminated without any reference to these abstruser inquiries, were it not that Hume and his disciples have frequently adverted to them, and that silence might be construed into inability to break through their web of sophistry. The argument of Dr. Campbell has already been briefly sketched ; I shall here add a few distinct considerations. And, first, with regard to *concurrent* testimony, it has been demonstrated upon genuine mathematical principles,(m) that where the credibility of each witness is great, a very few witnesses will be sufficient to overcome any contrary probability, derived from the nature of the fact ; that the evidence resulting from testimony can not only approach indefinitely near to certainty, but can at

(m) See the article *Credibility* in the PANTOLOGIA.

length exceed the evidence of any inference; however cogent, which can possibly be deduced from personal experience, or from personal and derived experience conjointly; that is, that the evidence of testimony can overcome any degree of improbability, however great, which can arise from the nature of the fact. The reason is, that the evidence of testimony admitting of an unlimited increase on two different accounts (namely, that of the *veracity* of the witnesses; and that of the *number* of concurrent witnesses); while the probability of the happening of any specific event admits only one of them, the former is capable of indefinitely surpassing the latter.

But indeed the force of the evidence resulting from concurrent testimony is avowedly so great upon the minds of all who have not been biased by the perusal of an indulgence in deistical speculations, that the matter scarcely needs the support of mathematical investigation. Let it be supposed that twelve men of probity and good sense were circumstantially and seriously told "a round, unvarnished tale" of a miracle performed before their eyes, and respecting which it was impossible (as they affirm) for them to be deceived, I believe few persons would wait to receive a thirteenth concurrent testimony before they yielded their assent to the truth of the relation, however extraordinary. Let it be supposed, farther, that the twelve evidences, on being suspected of "bearing

“false witness” subjected themselves to be scourged, tortured, nay strangled, rather than deny the truth of their attestation, could any reasonable or reasoning man refuse to believe their testimony? According to Mr. Hume’s argumentation we are not to believe them, were we to witness such a story and such sufferings: but I am so persuaded no person in his senses would *disbelieve* them, that I will venture to say even Mr. Hume under such circumstances could not have withheld his assent to the truth of their story.

“But,” say his disciples, “whatever might be “done or conceded in such a case, those, who live a “thousand years after the event, can have no reason “to believe it: if we admit that *concurrent* testi- “mony may augment; still *successive* testimony di- “minishes, and that so rapidly, as to command no “assent, after a few centuries at most.” This is specious, but, as I remarked at the commencement of this letter, far from correct. I do not deny, that there may be cases in which credibility vanishes with time; but no testimony is really, in the nature of things, rendered less credible by any other cause, than the loss or want of some of those conditions which first made it rationally credible. A testimony continues *equally* credible, so long as it is transmitted with all those circumstances and conditions which first procured it a certain degree of credit amongst

men, proportionate to the intrinsic value of those conditions. Let it be supposed that the persons, who transmit the testimony, are able, honest, and diligent, in all the requisite inquiries as to what they transmit, and how should the credibility due to their testimony be weakened, but by the omission of circumstances? which omission is contrary to the hypothesis. No calculation of the decrease of the credibility of testimony, in which a man bears witness respecting realities, and not the fictions of his own brain, can ever proceed upon any other principle, than that of the characters and qualifications of the witnesses: and, therefore, as far as the credibility of any matter of fact depends upon pure testimony, those, who live at the remotest distances of time, may have the same evidence of the truth of it, as those persons who lived nearest to the time in which the thing was said to be done; that identical time being, of course, excluded.

In what possible manner, for example, can the evidence on which we believe the facts related in the Gospels, be less than that on which those facts were accredited by Christians in the 2d or 3d centuries? They possessed the standard writings of the Evangelists; so do we: what those books then contained, they now contain; and the invention of printing seems likely, under the care of Providence, to preserve them genuine to the end of time. This ad-

mirable invention has so far secured all considerable monuments of antiquity, that no ordinary calamities of wars, dissolutions of governments, &c. can destroy any material evidence now in existence, or render it less probable to those who shall live in a thousand years' time, than it is to us. With regard to the facts of the Christian religion, indeed, it is notorious that our evidence in favour of them has *increased* instead of diminished since the era of printing, the reformation of religion, and the restoration of letters: and, as even the *recent* inquiries of learned men (*n*) have produced fresh evidence, there is every reason to hope it will continue to increase.

Indeed, it is only with regard to the facts related in the Bible, that men ever talk of the daily diminution of credibility. Who complains of a decay of evidence in relation to the actions of Alexander, Hannibal, Pompey, or Cæsar? How many fewer of the events recorded by Plutarch, or Polybius, or Livy, are believed now (on account of a diminution of evidence), than were believed by Mr. Addison, or Lord Clarendon, or Geoffrey Chaucer? It might be contended with some show of probability, that we know *more* of those ancients than the persons now mentioned; but that is widely different from accrediting *less*. We never hear persons wish-

(n) See the close of Letter V.

ing they had lived ages earlier, that they might have had better proofs that Cyrus was the conqueror of Babylon, that Darius was beaten in several battles by Alexander, that Titus destroyed Jerusalem, that Hannibal was entirely routed by Scipio, or Pompey by Julius Cæsar; though we sometimes find men of ardent and enterprising minds exclaiming—"O that "I had lived and been present when such and such "splendid events occurred: how lively an interest "should I have taken in such scenes, how much "concern in their termination!" And, indeed, it is the frequent hearing of like exclamations that causes men to confound weight of testimony with warmth or depth of feeling; and to lose sight of the essential difference between real evidence, or the true basis for belief of history, and the sensible impression or influence which such history may make upon the mind. We believe as firmly that Lucretius killed himself in the delirium of a fever, as that Lucretia stabbed herself in consequence of the wrongs she had received from Tarquin's son; yet we feel a much more lively interest in the latter event than in the former. The fate of Carthage, or the result of the contest between Anthony and Octavius respecting the empire of the world, would doubtless be much more deeply felt, and much more warmly conversed about, within two centuries of the circumstances, than they ever are now: yet those who then

conversed about them, had just as much reason to doubt their occurrence as we have ; that is, just none at all. And the like reasoning will apply to all the circumstances recorded in authentic history. So that, having established the genuineness and authenticity of the books of Scripture, on evidence far superior to that on which other historic books are received, it is the most idle and ridiculous thing imaginable, to affect to disbelieve any of the facts therein recorded, on account of the remoteness of the times in which they occurred.

Let me now attempt to collect the scattered arguments in this letter, with a few additional suggestions, to one point, and conclude. If, then, we have found, upon careful examination, that the miraculous facts proposed for our belief, and on the credit of which the divine authority of a particular system of doctrines and precepts depends, are such, 1. As do not imply a self-contradiction in them. 2. If they appear to have been performed publicly, in the view of several people, and with a professed intention to establish the divine authority of the person or persons who wrought them. 3. If they were many in number, frequently repeated, and continued for a series of years together. 4. If they were of an interesting nature in themselves, likely to have made strong impressions upon the minds of all who saw and heard of them ; and for that reason, probably,

much attended to, talked of, and examined, at the time of their performance. 5. If the effects produced by them were not transient, but lasting, such as must have existed for many years, and were capable all the while of being disproved if they were not real. 6. If the relations were committed to writing at or very near the time when the facts are said to have occurred, and by persons of unimpeachable integrity, who tell us that, "that which they have seen and heard, the same declare they unto us;" by persons, who, having sufficient opportunity of knowing the whole truth of what they testify, could not possibly be deceived themselves; and who, having no conceivable motive or temptation to falsify their evidence, cannot, with the least shadow of probability, be suspected of an intention to deceive other people. 7. If there be no proof, nor even well-founded suspicion of proof, that the testimony of those who bear witness to these extraordinary facts, was ever contradicted even by such as professed themselves open enemies to their persons, characters, and views, though the accounts of the facts were first published upon the spot where they were affirmed to have been originally performed, and amongst persons who were engaged by private interest, and furnished with full authority, inclination, and opportunity, to have manifested the falsity of them, and to have detected the imposture, had they been

able. 8. If, on the contrary, the existence of these facts be expressly allowed, by the persons who thought themselves most concerned, to prevent the genuine consequences which might be deduced from them ; and there were, originally, no other disputes about them, than to what sufficient cause they were to be imputed. 9. If, again, the witnesses from whom we have these facts were many in number, all of them unanimous in the substance of their evidence, and all, as may be collected from their whole conduct, men of such unquestionable good sense as secured them against all delusion in themselves : if they were men who evinced the sincerity of their own conviction, by acting under the uniform influence of the extraordinary works to which they bore witness, in direct contradiction to all their former prejudices and most favoured notions,—in direct contradiction also to every flattering prospect of worldly honour, profit, or advantage (as was remarkably exemplified in the case of St. Paul) ; and when they could not but be previously assured, that “ bonds and afflictions awaited them ;”<sup>(o)</sup> that ignominy, persecution, misery, and even death itself, most probably would attend the constant and invariable perseverance in their testimony. 10. If these witnesses, in order that their evidence might have the greater

(o) *Acts xx. 23.*

weight with a doubting world (each nation being already in possession of an established religion), were themselves enabled to perform such extraordinary works as testified the clear and indisputable interposition of a divine power in favour of their veracity ; and, after having experienced the severest afflictions, vexations, and torments, at length laid down their lives in confirmation of the truth of the facts asserted by them. 11. If great multitudes of the contemporaries of these witnesses, men of almost all nations, tempers, professions, and scales of intellect, were persuaded by them that these facts were really performed in the manner related, and gave the strongest testimony which it was in their power to give of the firmness and active tendency of their belief, by immediately breaking through all their previous attachments and connections of interest or friendship, and acting in express contradiction to them. 12. If concurring testimony, carried to a sufficient extent, and especially of this kind, be in its nature really irresistible ; and if successive testimony, under the circumstances of the case before us, rather increases than diminishes in credibility. 13. If ceremonies and institutions were grounded upon the miraculous facts, and have been uninterruptedly observed in all the successive periods of time, from the date of the facts in commemoration of which they were established. 14. If we have all the proof

which the severest rules of criticism can require, to evince that no alterations have been made in the original writings and records left us by these witnesses in any material article of their evidence since their first publication, either through accident or design; but that they have been transmitted to us in all their genuine purity, as they were left by their authors.—In such a situation of things, where so great a variety of circumstances, where indeed all imaginable circumstances, mutually concur to confirm, strengthen, and support each other's evidence; without a single argument on the other side but what arises merely from the extraordinary nature of the facts, and the admission of which inevitably leads to consequences at least as extraordinary as those the opponents are inclined to reject;—may not *they* be justly accused of an unreasonable incredulity who refuse their assent to them? And will not such incredulity be as dangerous as it is ridiculous? If facts, attested in so clear, decisive, and unexceptionable a manner, and delivered down to posterity with so many conspiring signs and monuments of truth, are, nevertheless, not to be believed; it is, I think, impossible for the united wisdom of mankind to point out any evidence of historical events, which will justify a wise and cautious man in accrediting them. Where there is the strongest assurance of the occurrence of any particular series of miraculous facts,

which we are capable of acquiring, according to the present frame of our nature, and the state of things in the world; to reject these miracles after all, and the religion in attestation of which they were wrought, and to pretend to excuse ourselves from believing them, upon the bare suspicion of a possibility that they *may* be false, is, instead of being an indication of freedom from shackles, and erectness and greatness of mind, a highly absurd contradiction to the principles of common sense, and the universal practice of mankind. That you and I, my friend, may be preserved from such a preposterous and dangerous absurdity, is the fervent wish of

Your's sincerely.

**LETTER VIII.***On the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

SEVERAL of the facts recorded in the Christian Scriptures have this to distinguish them from others, that they are intimately connected with doctrines; so intimately indeed, that the doctrine grows out of the fact, and that, consequently, the denial of the fact causes the annihilation of the doctrine, and prevents the springing forth of those happy effects which the doctrine is calculated to produce. Thus, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact; *our* resurrection is a doctrine founded upon that fact. The denial of one requires the renunciation of the other. "If," says Paul, "there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."(p) And again, "If we believe that Jesus Christ died, and rose again, even so, them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him."(q) Thus, also, the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven is a fact; his return from thence to judge the world is a dependent doctrine. Thus spake

(p) 1 Cor. xv. 13, 14.

(q) 1 Thess. iv. 14.

the angels to the disciples at the ascension of our Lord : “ Why stand ye gazing up into heaven ? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”(r) “ Shall come to be admired in his saints, and to be glorified in all them that believe.”(s)

Hence, since the most exalted hopes of a Christian, the most animating doctrines of his religion, have, for their basis, the fact of the RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ ; it is requisite that his faith in that fact be firmly “ rooted and grounded.” And, happily, the general evidences in confirmation of so important an event flow from various and satisfactory sources : As from the predictions of Jesus Christ, that at a certain time he should raise himself from the dead—From the fact that, at this precise time, his body was not to be found in the sepulchre, although the most effectual precautions had been taken to prevent its removal—From the positive testimony of *many*, that after this time they saw him, conversed with him, the most incredulous touched and felt him to remove their doubts, and all received from him those instructions on which they acted in promulgating his gospel—From the clumsy and self-destructive story invented by the Jews in contradiction

(r) Acts i. 11.

(s) 2 Thess. i. 10.

of this fact.(t) And from the success which attended the preaching and declaring that he was “ crucified and raised from the dead.”

It is not my intention to enlarge upon these various sources of evidence ; but merely, assuming (as I may now, I trust, fairly do) the genuineness of the first four books of the New Testament, to describe, briefly, the leading circumstances of Christ’s resurrection, and several appearances previous to his ascension ; and then to adduce a few general, though, I hope, unanswerable arguments, in favour of this extraordinary event.

The circumstances of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the subsequent appearances, as they may be collected from the accounts of the several Evangelists, have been related with slight variations by different authors. The order I shall adopt appears to me as free from objection, and as little exposed to the cavils of unbelievers, as any I have met with. To render this history the more perspicuous, it may be proper to begin with reminding you, that, when Jesus Christ was led to be crucified, a great company of his friends and acquaintance followed, bewailing and lamenting him.(v) Among the rest was his own mother, who, with two more of her name, and the apostle John, stood so near him, that he could speak

(t) Matt. xxviii, 13, 14.

(v) Luke xxiii. 27.

to them. While he was nailed to the cross, he consigned his mother to John's care, as it appears she was then a widow. This beloved disciple, probably, took her immediately to his own home, before the three hours' supernatural darkness, (w) that she might not be there to see him expiring. But the other two women continued there still, as well as many more who stood farther off. When the darkness was over, and our Lord had yielded up his spirit, they were there still; and all of them attended till he was buried. (x) It should seem, also, that the two Marys (y) waited later than the rest, till all was over, and he was laid in the sepulchre. (z) A considerable company of the women seem to have agreed to embalm their Lord's body early on the third day: they, therefore, prepared that evening what time and circumstances would admit, and rested on the sabbath, conformably to the commandment. (a)

Not so the priests and pharisees. With all their pretended zeal for the sabbath, they were very busy on that day consulting, agreeing, preparing an address, waiting with it on Pilate, obtaining a guard, sealing the stone, and setting all safe. This was *their*

(w) John xix. 25, 26, 27.

(x) Matt. xxvii. 55, 56. Mark xv. 40, 41. Luke xxiii. 49, 55.

(y) Namely, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the wife of Cleopas, and mother of Matthew, James, Simon, and Jude.

(z) Matt. xxvii. 61. Mark xv. 47. (a) Luke xxiii. 56.

sabbath-employment. (*b*) By the end of the day all was as safe as they could make it. But very early on the following morning, the first day of the week, i. e. about the break of day, or a little earlier, an angel descended from heaven, came and rolled back the stone from the entrance of the grave, and sat upon it, regardless of either seal or guard. The keepers or guards were terrified at his appearance, and became as dead men. (*c*) Recovering themselves a little, however, some of them went to the chief priests, and related what had happened : the chief priests and elders “gave large money to the soldiers,” saying, “Say ye, his disciples came by night, and ‘stole him while we slept.” (*d*)

About the time of the earthquake which occurred on the descent of the angel, the two Marys were preparing to go very early to see whether all about the sepulchre was safe, before the rest of the company could go. (*e*) Either they called on Salome, or met her in their way; (*f*) and as all three passed on towards the sepulchre, being desirous, probably, to begin to embalm the body before their friends arrive, “they said among themselves, who shall roll us away ‘the stone from the door of the sepulchre?’” All this time they knew nothing of the guard, or of the open-

(*b*) Matt. xxvii. 62—66.

(*c*) Matt. xxviii. 2, 3, 4.

(*d*) Matt. xxviii. 11—13.

(*e*) Matt. xxviii. 1.

(*f*) Mark xvi. 1.

ing of the grave : but as they came near the sepulchre “at the rising of the sun,” they looked forward, “and saw that the stone was rolled away ; for it was very great.” (g) This, as was natural, caused a multiplicity of varying emotions in their minds. Mary Magdalene, being at once warm in her affection, and anxious in her disposition, concluded that the body was stolen ; and would therefore go no farther, but hastily ran back to tell Peter and John what she had seen, and what she thought : those two zealous disciples, therefore, hastened thither to ascertain the truth of her relation. (h) But while she ran back, the other Mary and Salome approached nearer to the sepulchre. The angel, who formerly sat on the stone to terrify the guard, had by this time moved into the sepulchre ; for Christ rose and went out as soon as the stone was rolled away : and though the women were near enough to see the stone, they could see no angel upon it before Mary Magdalene ran back. Mary and Salome thus advancing, they found no obstruction, and resolved to ascertain whether the body was taken away or not. Just entering, therefore, into the sepulchre, they saw the angel, who invited them further in to “ behold the place where the Lord had lain.” But they were affrighted : so the angel told them “the Lord was risen,” directed them

(g) Mark xvi. 2, 3, 4.

(h) John xx. 1—4.

to go and inform his disciples, and Peter, and to tell them, moreover, that they should see him in Galilee; as he had assured them previous to his crucifixion. (i) The women, under the joint influence of fear, joy, and amazement, ran away, saying nothing to any one, but fled trembling. (k) They were just gone when Mary Magdalene arrived the second time, with Peter and John, though it was yet early. The two disciples, before they reached the sepulchre, ran quicker than Mary: the angel having now disappeared, the two men went *into* the sepulchre, found the body was not there, but saw the grave-clothes lying folded up, indicating that there had been no indecent haste. John *believed* "the Lord was "risen :" but they both soon went away home without seeing him. Mary Magdalene now tarried behind, to weep alone, appearing in much doubt as to what had become of the body of Jesus Christ. While in this mournful, anxious state of mind, she stooped down and looked earnestly into the sepulchre, where she saw *two* angels, one at the head, the other at the feet, where the body had lain. They asked why she wept: she replied it was because she had lost her lord; and as she made the answer, she in haste looked another way and *saw* Jesus; but not knowing him,

(i) Matt. xxviii, 5—7. Mark xvi, 5—7. Matt. xxvi. 32.

(k) Mark xvi, 8.

being half blinded by her apprehensions and her tears, she supposed it was the gardener who cultivated the garden in which the sepulchre was, and therefore said to him, “Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.” Then Jesus made himself known unto her. This therefore was his *first* appearance after his resurrection, to any of his people : and it was early. (*l*) Mary Magdalene departed immediately, “and told the disciples that she had seen ‘the Lord, and that he had spoken to her.’” Thus, as some of our old divines have remarked, woman, who was first in the original transgression, was first in proclaiming the fact of the resurrection, that grand corner stone in the Christian edifice.

The other Mary and Salome, full of fear and amazement, had turned aside into some retired place ; and needed time to recover themselves before they could carry any tidings. But while they were in this consternation, their compassionate Lord met them, and said, “All hail : be not afraid,” proceed cheerfully on, and deliver to my disciples the message you have received from the angel, “that they go into Galilee.” (*m*) This was the *second* appearance of Christ ; and it was to *two* women.

These three women and two of the apostles having

(*l*) John xx. 3—18. Mark xvi. 9, 10.    (*m*) Matt. xxviii. 9, 10.

been at the sepulchre, and Mary the last of them having departed, it being yet early: (n) just as she was gone Joanna came, and a considerable company with her; bringing the spices, &c. in order to embalm the body of Jesus, as they had agreed before the sabbath. They spent no time in reasoning about the removal of the stone, as the others had done; being a sufficient number to effect it, and expecting to meet the other three women at the place: for they knew nothing of what had passed at the sepulchre in the earlier part of the morning, before they arrived. When they got there, they found the stone rolled away: so they went into the sepulchre, and immediately perceived that the body was not there: but when they went in they saw no angel, as Mary and Salome had seen, sitting at the right side; (o) nor did the two angels, who spake to Mary Magdalene, now appear. Joanna and her companions, like the other women, were full of amazement; and while they were in this perplexity, behold two angels stood by them, and said, " why seek ye the living among "the dead? He is not here, but is risen, &c." (p) Then the women returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things to the eleven, and to others, who, it seems, were now gathered together, by reason of the report Peter and John had made on their return,

(n) Mark xvi. 9. (o) Mark xvi. 5. (p) Luke xxiv. 1—9.

from the sepulchre an hour or two before. When Peter and John were at the sepulchre, they had seen no angels ; nor had they heard any report that Jesus was actually risen : but on Joanna's relating what she had seen and heard, Peter, manifesting the ardent disposition which marked all his actions, ran a second time to the sepulchre; (g) and some others either along with him, or soon after him : (g) they all found that the body was not in the grave ; but they saw not Jesus.

Soon after this, two of them went a journey as far as Emmaus, about seven and a half miles from Jerusalem. We have no account of any more persons going to the sepulchre. But Peter, soon after the departure of the two disciples for Emmaus, retired to a place alone to meditate upon what had occurred, where his Lord appeared to him. This was the *third* appearance of Christ ; but the first (r) to any of his apostles. Jesus, having conversed a little with Peter, left him ; and soon coming up with the two disciples who were journeying to Emmaus, conversed with them a good while, and afterwards revealed himself unto them. (s) This was the *fourth* appearance.

While these two disciples were from Jerusalem, those at that city were in great concern ; for though Joanna had told them, from the angels, that Jesus

(g) Luke xxiv. 12-24.

(r) 1 Cor. xv. 5.

(s) Luke xxiv. 13-31.

was risen, yet her “words were as idle tales.” Some time after, Mary Magdalene brought them the tidings that she had “seen the Lord ;” she found them mourning and incredulous, notwithstanding the cheering tenor of the news she communicated. (*t*) The other Mary and Salome likewise conveyed their tidings, as they were directed, first by the angels, and then by Christ himself. (*v*) Late the same evening Peter came and informed them that he had seen Jesus. And as the disciples were discussing the evidences of his resurrection, some believing, others doubting, the two returned from Emmaus ; and while they received, on the one hand, the joyful intelligence, “the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to ‘Simon,’ ” they in their turn confirmed the account, telling “what things were done in the way, and how “he was known of them in breaking of bread,” (*w*) by this significant act reminding them of his last supper with them, and of the important institution he then established. Still, however, “some of them “believed not,” though Jesus had now appeared *four* times ; first to one woman, then to two ; after that to one man, and then to two.

Our Lord’s *fifth* appearance after his resurrection was much more public than any of the preceding ones; for while they were earnestly conversing upon this most

(*t*) Mark xvi. 10, 11. John xx. 17, 18. (*v*) Matt. xxviii. 7—10.

(*w*) Mark xvi. 13. Luke xxiv. 34, 35.

interesting topic, still on the evening of the first day of the week, just after the return of the two from Emmaus, " Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, " and said unto them, Peace be unto you."(x) Though Thomas was at this time absent, yet there was a considerable number of the disciples gathered together, besides ten of the apostles,(y) in order to inquire and learn more about Jesus Christ. Besides this, the guard having said that they had seen an angel at the sepulchre, the Jews were enraged that their precautions to detain the body were defeated, circulated the ridiculous story that it was stolen by the disciples of Jesus while the guards slept, and began to threaten the disciples; they, therefore, being " afraid of the Jews," dare not sleep in their own lodgings, but had assembled together, and shut the door, previously to this appearance of Jesus. (z) His sudden and unexpected appearance and address to them terrified them, so that they thought " it was a spirit," and not their Lord in the same identical body that was crucified and buried. But the Redeemer, to remove their distressing unbelieving thoughts, directed them to behold him stedfastly, to feel and touch him, and observe his lately wounded and pierced hands and feet. Then he ate before them, still farther to confirm their faith; and " opened the scriptures to

(x) Luke xxiv. 36.      (y) Luke xxiv. 33.      (z) John xx. 19.

"them," showing them that "thus it behoved Christ "to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third "day." (a) After that, conversing still farther with them, he gave them another sign of his real existence and life, by *breathing* upon them; of his divine power, by conferring upon them the Holy Spirit; and then departed. (b) Presently after, Thomas came in; but when the disciples told him they "had seen "the Lord," he refused his assent, and replied "except "I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and "put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust "my hand into his side, *I will not believe.*" (c) Such was the incredulity of this apostle, although Jesus had then been seen at *five* distinct times in the course of that one day.

At the close of the feast of unleavened bread, that is, on the succeeding first day of the week, Jesus again appeared unto the *eleven*, Thomas being with them: he upbraided him for his unbelief, allowed him the tests he wished for, and extorted from him the confession, "My Lord and my God!" (d) On this occasion, which was the *sixth* time of Jesus Christ's appearing, there does not seem to have been much conversation. The appearance was probably for the especial purpose of convincing Thomas.

(a) Luke xxiv. 37—48. John xx. 20. (b) John xx. 22.

(c) John xx. 25. (d) John xx. 26—29. Mark xvi. 14.



After this, the feast being now over, the eleven travelled to Galilee, being encouraged by promises both before and after the resurrection to expect the sight of their Lord there.(e) The distance was more than eighty miles from Jerusalem to Tiberias, and more still to Bethsaida and Capernaum. Thither, however, they went, inspired by these hopes; and shortly after their arrival there Jesus appeared again at the sea of Tiberias, or, as it was sometimes called, the sea of Galilee.(f) Here were seven of the disciples, probably of the eleven, following their occupation of fishers; they had been toiling all night, and caught nothing, when Jesus appeared, whom they knew not at first. In consequence of following his advice, they had a large and miraculous draught of fishes in their net; which was followed by a long, familiar, and interesting conversation, related pretty fully by the apostle John,(g) who was one of the disciples present. This was, as John terms it, the *third* time he had appeared to the body of the apostles; but it was his *seventh* appearance since his resurrection.

Probably it was at this familiar interview by the sea of Tiberias, that Jesus told these seven disciples when and where they might expect to see him in a very public manner, agreeably to the promise made

(e) Matt. xxviii. 16.

(f) John vi. 1. xxi. 1.

(g) John xxi. 12—23.

them before his death.(k) And thus it might be that they gave notice of it in a private manner to as many disciples as might be thought proper ; for even then, though he was to appear openly, yet it was not to a great variety, but “ to chosen witnesses,(l) who ate “ and drank with him after he rose from the dead.” Pursuant to this previous notice, as it should seem, there was a most numerous and public meeting upon a mountain in Galilee, where Jesus made his *eighth* appearance. Matthew says expressly(k) Jesus had appointed the mountain. The number assembled there was between five and six hundred called emphatically *brethren*,(l) denoting that they were all chosen witnesses, as Peter observed in the house of Cornelius. Here as he found “ some” still “ doubted,” he gave infallible proofs of his resurrection, and “ spake much of the things concerning the king-“ dom of God;”(m) being now about to take his final farewell of the greatest part of them on earth. It is worthy of observation, that the majority of the witnesses of this appearance were living, and appealed to as such, twenty years afterwards, when Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians.

The *ninth* appearance of Christ recorded in the Scriptures was to James. This, Paul informs us,

(h) Matt. xxviii, 7, 10. Mark xvii, 7. (i) Acts x, 40, 41.

(k) Matt. xxviii, 16, 17. (l) 1 Cor. xv, 6. (m) Acts i, 3.

was after that to the five hundred.(n) Probably it took place in Galilee, as well as the two last mentioned; but the evangelists give us no particular information about it. Paul, however, mentions it as a fact *well known*; otherwise he would not have adduced it in proof of the resurrection, denied as it was by some, and little understood by many who believed in the fact.

The tenth and last appearance of the risen Saviour was at Jerusalem, "to all the apostles,"(o) that is, to the eleven remaining ones, Judas being "gone to his "own place." It was about six weeks after the passover, about forty days after the resurrection, when several of the disciples from Galilee repaired again to Jerusalem, in order to keep the approaching feast of weeks called the Pentecost by the Grecian Jews. Being assembled together with the disciples at Jerusalem in one house, probably the same where Jesus had kept the passover and instituted his supper; and the same in which they met on the day of the resurrection, and on that day week, and where they worshipped till the day of Pentecost.(p) There they had the conversation with their Lord recorded in the first chapter of the Acts.(q) There he gave them commandments, and spake more "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."(r) There he delivered to them the com-

(n) 1 Cor. xv. 7. (o) 1 Cor. xv. 7. (p) Acts i. 13. ii. 1.

(q) Acts i. 6, 7, 8. (r) Acts i. 3.

mission to go forth into all the world, to preach, and baptize (for baptism, it should be remembered was not instituted as a *Christian* ordinance till after the resurrection), and gave them animating promises of his presence while their life continued, and to their successors in the ministry “to the end of the world.”(s) There he commanded them not to depart into Galilee again, but to tarry at Jerusalem till they should “be baptized with the Holy Ghost,” which he assured them would be in the course of a few days.(t) This last interview would doubtless be very endearing, affecting, and instructive. And, as if to impress the circumstance with all its important lessons, and all its solemn tendencies, more deeply on their minds, he led them out towards Bethany or *Mount Olivet*, conversing as they went, according to his wonted manner. Often had he retired with his dear and beloved disciples to that secluded spot; and thither he now for the last time conducted them. There,—near the place whence he commenced his triumphant ride into Jerusalem,—where he had frequently conversed, expounded parables, and prayed with his disciples,—where, in so much agony, he had recently prayed, and sweat as it were “drops of blood,”—where he was betrayed with a kiss, taken by his enemies, and forsaken

(s) Matt. xxviii. 18, 19, 20 Mark xvi. 15—18.

(t) Luke xxiv. 49. Acts i. 4, 5, 8.

by his disciples; there he once more assembled them, “lifted up his hands and blessed them;” and “while he blessed them,” he was taken up from them into heaven, “a cloud receiving him out of their sight.”(v) Thus then it appears from apostolic testimony that Jesus Christ not only rose from the dead, but rendered himself manifest to *many* after his resurrection, removing the doubts of the incredulous by “the most infallible proofs,” and confirming the faith of the weak by the most consoling and cheering promises; promises which speedily after were amply fulfilled.(w)

“ Twice twenty days he sojourn'd here on earth,  
“ And show'd himself alive to chosen witnesses  
“ By proofs so strong, that the most slow-assenting  
“ Had not a scruple left. This having done,  
“ He mounted up to heaven.”

BLAIR.

Such, in few words, is the history of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, and of his various appearances after that important event. I have drawn this account not from the writings of any one evangelist, but from a collection of their separate stories: for the relations of these four historians, though not discordant, do not each comprise *all* the circumstances. This, however, is by no means to be regretted. Such a complete coincidence between four narratives relating to the same events, as should extend to every

(v) Mark xvi. 19. Luke xxiv. 50—52. Acts i. 9—12.

(w) Acts ii.

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minute circumstance, would argue collusion, or, at least, dependence ; whereas, four narratives, each exhibiting the grand outlines of the story, but varying as to minuter matters, some mentioning one, and some another, according to the particular object or individual feeling of each respective writer, naturally suggest the ideas of honest and of independent narration, and exclude those of contrivance and forgery.

Admitting, then, the genuineness and authenticity of the historical books of the New Testament (points which I trust have been satisfactorily established in my fifth letter), the resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be denied. Yet as this extraordinary fact is of the greatest moment in the Christian system, you will naturally expect that I will not quit the subject merely with this summary argument in its favour. I shall, therefore, devote the remainder of this letter to the consideration of two or three such particular evidences as in themselves force our assent ; and to a cursory view of some of the difficulties that spring from a denial of the fact.

Both the Jewish and the Gentile opposers of Christianity, in the primitive ages, admit that Jesus Christ suffered death by crucifixion, was buried, and that his tomb was found empty on the third day. Either then the body must have been *taken* away, or he rose from the dead. If the body were stolen, it must have been either by the enemies, or by the friends, of

Christ : of these alternatives the former cannot be assumed for a moment ; and I shall soon show that the latter, though rather more specious, is utterly untenable. The disciples of the Saviour affirm that he rose from the dead, and often appeared to *them*, as I have already related. They also immediately after the event set apart a solemn periodical day, and instituted a ceremony founded upon it, and commemorating it ; the returning day, and the significant ceremony, having been observed regularly from that time through all succeeding ages to the present. Thus, with regard to the *day*, it appears from various passages, to two or three of which I refer you, (x) that the apostles, very soon after the death of their Lord, set apart the *first* day of the week, being that on which they affirmed he rose from the dead, as a day of religious worship, of Christian rejoicing on account of that important event, calling it *the Lord's Day*; it appears, too, that the Christian converts *in general*, both at Jerusalem and at other places, united with them in solemnizing this day, and for the reason just specified. Farther, the most ancient writers in the Christian church, after the apostles, agree in assuring us that the observation of the first day of the week prevailed early and constantly. IGNATIUS calls it *the Queen of Days*. MELITO wrote a book concerning it. JUSTIN

(x) Acts xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. Rev. i. 10.

THE MARTYR and TERTULLIAN speak expressly in their apologies of stated Christian assemblies held on that day. CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS, and many others, furnish similar evidence. Nay PLINY, a very few years after the death of St. John, speaks of it as the sacred day of the Christians. Let the reasoning of Mr. Leslie adduced in my letter on miracles be applied, then, to the case before us, and you will find it impossible to account rationally for the observance of the Lord's day without allowing the fact of the resurrection.

Thus again, with respect to *Baptism*: as a Christian ordinance it was instituted (as I have already remarked) *after* the resurrection of Jesus Christ.(y) None were to be baptized except they believed: "If "thou believest with all thine heart," said Philip to the Eunuch, "thou mayest" be baptized.(z) This antecedent belief included both the crucifixion and the *resurrection* of Jesus; and the primitive mode of administering baptism aptly represented both, agreeably to the language of Paul:—"Buried with "him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with "him, through the faith of the operation of God "who hath raised him from the dead."(a) Now on the day of Pentecost, when Peter addressed the mul-

(y) Matt. xxviii. 19. Mark xvi. 16.

(z) Acts viii. 37.

(a) Coloss. ii. 12.

titude then collected together, he reasoned principally upon the fact of the resurrection, and affirmed that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was thus raised up in proof that he was " both Lord and Christ." So convincing were his arguments within that short distance of the date assigned to the resurrection, that on this one day *three thousand* believed, and were baptized, that is, baptized in token of their belief that Jesus died, rose again, and instituted Baptism *after* his resurrection. Here, therefore, in like manner, the reasoning is conclusive. It is impossible to account for the introduction of Baptism " in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," (b) at any time, and much less for the circumstance of *thousands* submitting to the ordinance within a few days of that on which the apostles declared Jesus rose, unless it be allowed that they were thoroughly convinced of the truth of the fact : and if *thousands* who were at Jerusalem at the precise period assigned to the resurrection of Jesus Christ had satisfied themselves of its reality, it is the most puerile of all puerile things (to say nothing of its banefulness) to devise and urge objections at the distance of eighteen hundred years : such, however, is the puerility of men whose minds are too strong to bend to the teachings of Infinite Wisdom.

But, as arguments in favour of this great fact flow

(b) Matt. xxviii. 19.

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from various quarters, let it be farther considered, that, if the account of Christ's resurrection had been false, the imposture must necessarily have been detected. For the advocates for Christianity may argue, and its opponents cannot with any appearance of reason deny,—that the apostles immediately after the resurrection declared it:—that they made this declaration upon the very spot where the thing was pretended to have occurred:—that they did not disseminate their story covertly; but proclaimed it in the most open and public manner possible:—that they did not begin to circulate their report in some secret and obscure corner; but in one of the most celebrated and public places then existing in the world:—that they made choice of a season in which there was the greatest concourse and resort of all sorts of people thither; that they might gain the greatest number of hearers and of inquirers into the truth of their extraordinary narration:—that the professed adversaries of the Christian doctrine then at Jerusalem had many weighty and powerful reasons to stimulate them to exert their utmost efforts to prove it false:—that they had as much time and opportunity as could well be desired to devote to the detection of the imposture, had there been any:—and, that they had likewise power in their hands, by which they were enabled to examine all persons and things that might

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in any way conduce to throw light upon this remarkable and highly interesting subject.

Under circumstances so favourable to refutation, there can be no doubt that the Jews would have refuted the story of the apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ, had it been in their power: and besides this, the Jews had an additional motive arising from the injury sustained by their moral character, unless they could prove the statements of the Christians to be intentionally and wickedly erroneous. It will be readily granted, I suppose, that, when two parties of men are directly and strongly opposed to each other, if the one asserts and publishes a statement as to matter of fact which is of the highest moment, and absolutely destructive of the interest of the other, and is not so palpably false as to carry with it plain indications of malignity and revenge, or of studied slander and scandal; that then, if the other party, upon whom this charge is made, does not in as solemn and public a manner refute it, or do something in their own vindication, which will, in the opinion of unbiassed and unprejudiced persons, bear some proportion to the attack made upon them,—in such case, the accused party tacitly acknowledge the truth of what the accusing party have alleged against them, and thus, of consequence, relinquish the cause. Now this is exactly the state of the case between the

early Jews and Christians. The evangelist Matthew publishes to the world in unequivocal terms, that the Jews bribed the soldiers to report that the body of Christ was stolen by his disciples when they (the guards) were asleep ;(c) and the early Christians uniformly asserted the same thing. To record thus in the evangelical history that the Jews were guilty of this ridiculous and self-destructive, and yet horrid and abominable, piece of forgery and bribery ; to tell the world that they acted so foul and sordid a part as to tamper with the soldiers, and get them to circulate a story which in their hearts they knew to be notoriously false, as well as absurd, since no man can accurately ascertain what is carried on near him when his senses are locked up in sleep ; to do this, was to depict the Jews to the world in the very worst colours in which men could be drawn, and to expose the cause of these enemies of Christ as desperate and forlorn to the last degree. Is it not natural to conclude that the Jews would in some signal manner have vindicated themselves from this charge, if they had not known and felt that vindication was impossible, the thing being *notorious*? and is it not an equally necessary inference, that the Jews at that time were fully persuaded that Jesus Christ was indeed risen? otherwise, why should they offer bribes, and invent an absurd story to conceal it?

(c) Matt. xxviii. 13.

Thus much may suffice to establish the truth of the momentous fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. From this outline of arguments, for it is indeed nothing more than an outline, you will perceive that the evidence in favour of this event is both forcible and satisfactory. To believe it, then, is reasonable; and it is freed from absurdity, because resurrection from the dead is manifestly as much within the power of God as creation; and every consistent theist admits the latter. But the adoption of a contrary opinion is pregnant with absurdities and natural impossibilities; with the mention of a few of which I shall close this letter.

He, who denies the resurrection of Jesus Christ, must believe,—That twelve poor fishermen and tent-makers, without power, and (all except Paul) without human learning, were able to deceive the wise, the learned, the prudent; and to lay their plot so deep, that neither their cotemporaries, nor any succeeding generation, should be able to detect and expose the cheat.

—That those very persons who but a few hours before were trembling with timidity and fear, whose want of courage (even according to their own account) overcame their fidelity, and caused them to forsake their master in his greatest extremity, notwithstanding their various professions, nay, protestations of

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inviolable attachment and zeal; being so terrified with apprehensions that they dare not acknowledge themselves to be his disciples, but secreted themselves by day for fear of the Jews;—yet that these timid, irresolute creatures should all at once not only form the plan, but execute the bold, hazardous, and useless undertaking, of conquering the guards, forcing the sepulchre, and carrying off the body of their crucified Lord.

—That men thus rash and desperate engaged in an enterprise of so much danger, an enterprise which therefore required all possible expedition and despatch, should waste time in unaccountable niceties and ceremonies (such as divesting the body of its burial-clothes, disposing them in separate parcels, &c.) which could be of no manner of use; but evidently exposed them to the danger of being surprised by the guards, and taken into custody.

—That these timid, yet desperate, men, who constituted a company of the greatest impostors that ever existed in the world, and who, therefore, must necessarily be the worst men that ever were, did, notwithstanding, furnish mankind with the most comprehensive and exact system of morality extant, teach such rules of living as were infinitely superior to any of the productions of Greek or Roman philosophers, and though their whole business was only to promote and disseminate falsehood and deception, yet denoun-

ced the severest eternal punishments upon all who indulged in such wicked practices.

—That these impostors, having themselves no correct notions of God, should notwithstanding impart the most rational and becoming opinions respecting him to the rest of mankind ; and, by no other principles than those of delusion and irreligion, kindle a flame of desire in the breasts of thousands to serve and worship God.

—That they took far more pains to expose themselves to all the world, as the most abandoned sinners that ever came into it (for that they should *deceive* themselves so as to believe Jesus was seen *ten* distinct times after his resurrection, when he was not seen at all, cannot be imagined), than they need have done to have established the best reputation among their cotemporaries, and have procured an immortal fame in all succeeding ages.

—That these impostors, after spending their lives in promulgating falsehood, died, not to testify their belief in a speculative doctrine respecting which they might be deluded by others, or self-deluded ; but in attestation of a pretended fact, while they knew it was no fact ; and all this under the strongest declarations of devotedness to God, and of adoration to their risen Saviour, whom they pretended was now sitting in heaven to receive them.(d)

(d) *Acts vii. 59.*

Hence you will perceive that as a general denial of revelation leads to numerous gross absurdities, of which a few were detailed in my first letter; so a denial of individual topics of revealed truth brings each its appropriate and dependent string of difficulties. He who denies the truth of scripture prophecy must admit that things have occurred, although there was an infinitely great probability against their occurrence. He, who disbelieves the miracles recorded in scripture, must believe in other miracles. And he, who denies the particular miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, in consequence involves himself in the particular class of absurdities to which I have just adverted: besides which he voluntarily excludes himself from the only strong consolation a rational creature can possess at the hour of death, that flowing from a full persuasion of the resurrection to eternal life. "I am the Resurrection and the life," said Jesus Christ : " whosoever believeth in me shall not die eternally:"(e) and his own resurrection fully establishes the truth of this consolatory declaration, But the proud philosophist who rejects this doctrine, so suited to the wishes and the wants of man, not only places himself below the Christian, but below the *Indian*, in point of prospects of futurity. The poor untutored, despised Indian,

(e) John xi. 25, 26.

" Thinks, admitted to that equal sky,  
" His faithful dog shall bear him company."

While many of those who pity the stupidity of the Indian, and sneer at the credulity of the Christian, live and die under the embasing conviction that at death themselves and their *dogs* will be alike extinct, alike free from responsibility, alike unconscious of all around them, alike excluded from pleasure, alike liberated from pain !

I am, &c.

## LETTER IX.

*Evidence drawn from the rapid Diffusion of Christianity, and its Triumph over Persecution; also, from the Purity and Excellency of the Scripture Morality and Theology.*

THE two topics I have selected for discussion in this letter might each furnish matter for a volume; and the argument, if judiciously handled, would rather gain strength, than become weakened by such dilation. I mean, however, in either case to present you with a mere outline of the argument, and leave you to give colour and force to the former, by your acquaintance with the history of the first four centuries of the Church, and to the latter by a careful perusal of the Holy Scriptures.

Our reasoning is simple, and rests upon the principles of Natural Religion. God will aid that which is good, and check that which is bad, in so far that each shall be rendered subservient to a higher good: hence it is agreeable to Divine Providence to give the most rapid and extensive diffusion to that which is, in itself and its tendencies, best: and hence it will follow, since God has regard to human affairs, and since the Christian Religion cannot be good if

It be not *true*, that it is what it professes to be, and  
is therefore *divine*.

It is, I believe, an undeniable fact, that before the end of the second century Christianity had been more widely disseminated over the face of the earth, than any one religion, true or false. Heathenism, in all its varieties of dismal shades, had been thickening for thousands of years, until “darkness covered the lands, and gross darkness the people.” But as the natural sun chases away darkness from whole regions, with analogous rapidity did the “sun” of righteousness dispel the moral gloom, and destroy the tenebrious reign of Satan. Thus IAENAEUS affirms that, in his time, not only those near Palestine, but the Egyptians, the Libyans, the Celts, the Germans, &c. had one belief: nay, says he, “the preaching of the truth shines *every where*, and enlightens all men who are *willing* to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (f). CLEMENS again affirms that, in his time, “Christ was known in *all* nations.” (g). And, that I may not needlessly multiply quotations, let me once for all cite TERTULLIAN. (h) “In whom else have all nations believed, but in Christ who lately came? In whom have all these nations believed? i. e. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, Ar-

(f) Iren. lib. i. cap. 3.

(g) Strom. v.

(h) Cont. Jud. lib. I.

"menia, Phrygia, Cappadocia; the inhabitants of  
"Pontus, and Asia, and Pamphylia; they that  
"dwell in Egypt, and they who live in Africa, be-  
"yond Cyrene; Romans, and strangers; Jews, and of  
"other nations in Jerusalem; the various sorts of  
"people in Getulea; the many countries of the  
"Moors; all the borders of Spain; the different  
"nations of Gaul; and those parts of Britain which  
"the Romans could not reach, *even they are subject*  
"*to Christ*; the Sarmata also, and Daci, the Ger-  
"mans and Scythians; and many other obscure na-  
"tions, with many provinces and islands scarcely  
"known to us: in all these the name of Christ,  
"lately as he came, reigns." Presently after, this  
distinguished apologist shows how much larger the  
kingdom of Christ was, even in his time (the second  
century), than any of the *Great Monarchies*, as they  
are usually called, and then proceeds thus: "The  
"kingdom of Christ is every where extended, every  
"where received; in all the abovementioned nations  
"is esteemed. He reigns every where, is adored in  
"all places, is divided equally amongst all known  
"countries."

Now what religion was there that could compare  
with this for the extent of its possession? The only  
plausible answer is—Heathenism. But Heathenism,  
it should be recollectcd, though it be one name, is  
not one religion. Heathens do not all worship the

same thing, as I have abundantly shown in a former letter ; nor are they governed by the same law, or bow to one common master in religious matters. The only religions which even now can bear any comparison in point of number of votaries with the Christian, are the Jewish and the Mahometan ; and both of them are decidedly inferior in this respect. The Jews indeed, though very much scattered over the face of the earth, are but one nation, and follow one religion, namely, that which in the Divine dispensations prepared the way for Christianity. But their religion, it is well known, has received no remarkable increase since the time of Christ ; and even their own law is made more known through the efforts of the Christians than their own. As to Mahometanism, it is settled and established in many countries ; but not *alone* : for Christianity is esteemed in some of those countries ; nay, in some, indeed, by a greater proportion of the inhabitants : whereas, on the contrary, there are many parts of Christendom where there is not a single Mahometan to be found, except as a sojourner or a visitor.

How then was this rapid promulgation, and permanent preponderancy, of the Christian religion occasioned ? Was it primarily, by courting the aid of the great, the learned, the powerful ; by enlisting states and governments in the cause of Christ ? Certainly not. Most men, we observe, are prepared to

follow the example, and comply with the wishes, of kings and rulers; especially if they are enforced with retributive or compulsive laws. To these the religions of the Jews, of the Pagans, and of the Mahometans, owed much of their increase. But Christianity, during the time it spread most rapidly, was not incorporated with the state, as was Judaism, and many systems of Paganism; nor was it propagated by the sword of its advocates, as was Mahometanism. They who first taught the Christian religion were not only men without any secular authority, but of low fortune, such as fishermen and tent-makers: and yet, by the instrumentality of these men, that doctrine was in the course of thirty years disseminated, not only through all parts of the Roman empire, but as far as the Parthians and Indians. And not only at its earliest commencement, but for nearly three hundred years, by the industry and zeal of private, obscure persons, without any threats, without any invitations, nay, opposed as much as possible by those who were in authority, this religion was so widely promulgated, that long before Constantine professed Christianity, it was received in the greatest part of the Roman empire. "We are but of yes-  
" terday," says TERTULLIAN, "and have filled  
" all places belonging to you; your cities, islands,  
" castles, towns, councils; your very *camps*, tribes,

"companies, the palace, senate, and forum : we  
"have left you only your *temples*." (i)

Nor was this effected by adventitious means. They among the Greeks, who delivered their imperfect precepts of morality, at the same time rendered themselves acceptable by other arts : as the Platonists, by the study of geometry ; the Peripatetics, by the history of plants and of animals ; the Stoicks, by logical subtlety ; the Pythagoreans, by the knowledge of numbers, and their application to the principles of harmony. Many of them, as Plato, Xenophon, Theophrastus, &c. were endowed with the most admirable eloquence. Not so the Apostles and first teachers of Christianity. "When I came to you," says Paul to the Corinthians, (k) "I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God : for I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling : and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom ; but in demonstration of the spirit and of power." Indeed, as if in order "to mortify human vanity, to convince the world that religion was a plain simple thing, and that a little common sense, accompanied with an

(i) *Test. Apol.* ii. cap. 37.

(k) 1 Cor. ii. 1—4.

honest good heart, was sufficient to propagate it, without any aid derived from the cabinets of princes, or the schools of human science, the founder of the Christian Religion took twelve poor illiterate men into his company, admitted them to an intimacy with himself, and, after he had kept them awhile in tuition, promised them the aid of his spirit, and sent them to preach the good tidings of salvation to their countrymen." A while after he sent seventy more, giving them a simple but efficacious preparation; and sent them forth to preach the Gospel. "As ye go," says he, "preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses: nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." (l) Thus equipped, they went forth to their momentous but dangerous undertaking. They delivered the history, they declared the precepts, promises, and threatenings, in bare words, unaccompanied with any secular power. Yet they were every where successful as to the object of their mission, and in the course of two centuries accomplished what I have already described;

so that we must of necessity allow, either that they were attended by miracles, or that the secret influence of God favoured their efforts, or both; and in either case it follows, that the cause they espoused was the cause of God.

This will appear still more obviously, if we consider the impediments with which they had to contend, and the difficulties which arose even from the nature of the religion they professed. Considered as a system intended to effect proselytism by the usual means, it was fundamentally erroneous. No quality could be imagined more directly calculated, considering the state of the world about the Christian æra, to frustrate the attempts of the primitive Christians than the inflexibility, or, as it has been called, the intolerance of their zeal. It is true, the religion they proposed was so far of a general nature, that none were necessarily excluded from the benefit of it: all were invited to partake of its blessings. Yet, notwithstanding this liberality, Christianity was in the strictest sense, in its relation to other religions then prevailing, an *unsocial religion*. Unlike the various schemes and modifications of polytheism, it would neither accommodate itself to the reigning superstitions, nor would it admit of any association with them. "Keep yourselves from *idols*,"<sup>(m)</sup> was an

(m) 1 John v. 21. 1 Cor. x. 14. 2 Cor. vi. 16, 17.

injunction incessantly ringing in the ears, and meeting the eyes of the first disciples. "What can be the "reason," said Æmilian, Prefect of Egypt, to Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, "why you may not "still adore that God of yours, supposing him to be "a God, in conjunction with our Gods?" "We "worship no other God," replied Dionysius. In the ears of a Polytheist such language was unpardonable: yet it was the language uniformly suggested by the Christian religion. This religion was formed to stand alone; and wherever it prevailed, it was over the *ruins* of other systems. With such pretensions, the heralds of the gospel could not well hope for a favourable reception. Their apparent arrogance could only serve to provoke the indignation of those whom they endeavoured to convert; and the ardent zeal with which they prosecuted their cause would, "*according to the NATURAL course of things,*" have a direct tendency to defeat their object. (n)

Besides this, the minds of those to whom this new religion was proposed were pre-occupied. They were filled with opinions, and moulded into habits, all of which were directly and powerfully repugnant to the spirit of Christianity. The Hebrews were prepared for the reception of the Law of Moses, by the previous appointment of circumcision, and by their know-

(n) See Warburton's *Divine Legation*, book ii. § 6.

ledge of one God. But, from a moderate acquaintance with the state of the Jewish and Gentile world at the origin of Christianity, it must be evident that every thing that most strongly influences and tyrannizes over the mind of man,—Religion, custom, law, policy, pride, interest, vice, and even philosophy,—were united against the gospel. These enemies were, in their own nature, very formidable and difficult to be subdued, had they even suffered themselves to be attacked upon equal ground. But, not relying upon their own strength, when barely opposed to the obscure disciples of a crucified malefactor (for prejudice and falsehood are always timid and fearful), they entrenched themselves behind that power of which they were in possession, and rendered themselves inaccessible, as they imagined, to Christianity, by planting round them not only all kinds of civil discouragements, but even torments, chains, and death: terrors, which no one could despise, who had any views of ambition or interest, and who was not even contented to resign his reputation, his ease, his fortune, and his life;—for the relinquishment of all these was the frequent consequence of the early profession of Christianity.

“And now,” said St. Paul; on taking leave of the elders of the Church at Ephesus, “now behold “I go urged by the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing “the things which shall befall me there: save that

"the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying;  
"that *bonds and afflictions await me*. But none of  
"these things move me, neither count I my life  
"dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course  
"with joy, and the ministry which I have received  
"of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the  
"grace of God."(o) Similar to this in kind, if not  
in degree, must have been the expectation of all  
zealous Christians in the primitive ages. They were  
called, in consequence of their profession, to the  
greatest sufferings. For centuries they were excluded  
from all places of honour, were fined, had their  
goods confiscated, were banished; and these were  
*small* things. They were condemned to the mines,  
had the most cruel torments inflicted upon them that  
men could invent; nay, the punishments of death  
were so common that, as related by the writers of  
those times, no famine, pestilence, or war, ever  
consumed more men at a time. The persecutions, to  
which the early Christians were exposed, followed  
one another with furious and unrelenting rapidity,  
leaving the Church scarcely time to breathe between  
the several sanguinary attacks under which she lan-  
guished and suffered. No sooner had the converts to  
Christianity, in the language of Tacitus, become a  
vast multitude,(p) than the first great persecution

(o) Acts xx. 22-24.

(p) *Ingens multitudo.* Tac. Hist. lib. xv. § 44.

began, under *Nero*, A. D. 65. The second happened under *Domitian*, A. D. 90. The third commenced under *Trajan*, A. D. 100. The fourth under *Adrian*, A. D. 126, and continued under *Antoninus Pius*, to A. D. 140. The fifth under *Marcus Aurelius*, A. D. 162. The sixth under *Severus*, A. D. 203. The seventh under *Maximinus*, A. D. 236. The eighth under *Decius*, A. D. 251. The ninth under *Valerian*, A. D. 258. The tenth under *Diocletian*, A. D. 303. And what, you will ask, was the nature of these persecutions? In reply, I shall briefly describe the last. In the edict issued by Diocletian, in 303, he commanded all the churches to be demolished, and the Christians to be *deprived of their sacred writings*, and of all their civil privileges and immunities: it occasioned the death of very many, who refused to surrender their religious books to the magistrates. A second edict ordered the *imprisonment* of all bishops and ministers of the gospel. A third commanded that the most exquisite *tortures* should be employed, to constrain these captives to lead the way in open apostacy. In a fourth, promulgated A. D. 304, all magistrates were enjoined to exercise these tortures upon *all Christians*, without distinction of rank or sex, for the purpose of forcing them to renounce their religion. These edicts, which extended over the whole Roman empire, with the exception of Gaul, were executed with such

active, brutal, and successful zeal, that pillars were erected in Spain in honour of Diocletian, for having “*every where* abolished the superstition of Christ;” and a medal of this emperor, still extant, was struck with the inscription—“*Nomine Christianorum de-letō.*”<sup>(g)</sup> Besides these, there were persecutions in Africa, in Persia, in Arabia, Cappadocia, Mesopotamia, Nicomedia, Phrygia, and in almost every place where the Christian name was known. Christianity had every where armed against it, the policy of empires, the jealousy of magistrates both supreme and subordinate, the interests of the priesthood, the virulent, systematic, and well disciplined rancour of the philosophers, and the furious passions of an inflamed and superstitious populace; and thus, those who suffered for “the cause of Christ,” men, women, youths of both sexes, were so numerous as to be estimated only in the mass; many of them falling under the weight of such excruciating torments, as cannot be read or thought of without agony and horror. Yet, though such as these were the difficulties with which Christianity had to struggle for many ages, still she prevailed. “*The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church.*” That which might have been thought most uncongenial to the growth of the new religion, was found most

(g) Milner's Church History, vol. ii. p. 6, 7.

propitious to it. It prevailed, notwithstanding this astonishing, this unprecedented, this universal opposition, so as to change the whole face of things, to overturn the temples and the altars of the gods, silence the oracles, mortify the impious pride of emperors, confound the presumptuous wisdom of philosophers,—and infuse into the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands a new spirit, and transform them into new men.

Whence did the new religion acquire this mysterious and inextinguishable potency? Was it “from “heaven, or of men?” No natural cause can account for it: indeed it is contrary to the whole course of natural causes. Weak, illiterate men, of the lowest class,—men, who have nothing *in this world* to offer their converts, but sufferings, tortures, and the cross,—who are every where oppugned, persecuted, and ill-treated, “even unto death;”—these are they who “triumph over flesh and blood,” and convert the universe. The cause is to be found alone in the omnipotence of truth, and especially the truth of God. “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the “lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, “the blind see, the dead are raised, the poor (reck-“oned of no estimation in the eyes of the world) the “poor have the gospel preached unto them.”(r) In

(r) Matt. xi. 5.

this name the legislator of the universe speaks, nations hear, and rejoice, and live : and thus we arrive at the only competent and adequate solution of the difficulty, why *genuine* Christianity, whose peculiar characteristic was *non-resistance*, should be every where and in all ages opposed ; and yet should every where and in all ages increase. Thus, in the clearest and purest manifestation of himself to the world, God evinced his perfect independence of human wisdom and human power : he passed by the splendor of thrones and the glory of philosophy, and showed that he could command all nature, and influence all hearts, by means the most humble, and most likely to be contemned. " He chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and the weak things of the world to confound those which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, did God choose, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are : that no flesh should glory in his presence." (s)

Having thus exhibited the argument drawn from the early propagation of Christianity, let me now briefly advert to that which flows from the purity, excellency, and extent, of the Christian morality and theology.

(s) 1 Cor. i. 27, 28, 29.

The nature of these may be gathered from the testimony of the enemies to Christianity, from its effect upon the character and conduct of its converts in all ages, and from the uniform tenor of the Holy Scriptures. Here then, 1st, as to the testimony of enemies to Christianity, since I must conform to the principle of selection, I shall cite only two; but they will be simply sufficient to my purpose. Of these, the first is PLINY the younger, who, in his celebrated letter to Trajan, writes thus from Nicomedia, concerning the Christians under his government:—  
“The sum total of their fault, or of their error, consisted in assembling upon a certain stated day, before it was light, to sing alternately among themselves *hymns to Christ, as to a God*; binding themselves, by oath, not to be guilty of any wickedness; not to steal, nor to rob; not to commit adultery; nor break their faith when plighted; nor to deny the deposits in their hands, whenever called upon to restore them. These ceremonies performed, they usually departed, and came together again to take a repast, the meat of which was innocent, and eaten promiscuously.”<sup>(t)</sup> The only crime this governor could discover in the Christians, was “merely an obstinate kind of superstition, carried to great excess.” He therefore asks, “must they be

(t) Orrery's Pliny, book x. epist. 97.

“ punished for the *name*, though otherwise innocent? Or is the name itself so flagitious, as to be “ punishable?”

My next evidence is LUCIAN, one of the ablest writers of his age, and one of the chief magistrates of a great province of the empire. “ The legislator of the Christians (says he) persuades them that they are all brethren. They secede from us: they abjure the gods of the Grecians. They *adore their crucified teacher*, and conform their lives to his laws. They despise riches; every thing amongst them is in common; and they are constant in their faith. To this day they adore their great man crucified in Palestine.”(v)

Such, then, according to the testimony of Pliny and Lucian, was the effect of Christianity upon the minds and conduct of those who embraced it, that they engaged not to commit *any crime*, that they adhered strictly to their promises, that they could have no crime imputed to them but obstinate attachment to their religion, that they despised riches, and that they loved one another as brethren. If any person were seeking for criteria of a false religion, of a religion founded upon wickedness, and cemented by deceit (and such must the Christian religion be, if it did not emanate from God), would he be satisfied with such as these?

(v) *Lucian de morte Peregrini.*

But let us notice the effect of Christianity upon one who was long a *hater* of it, and became, notwithstanding, its illustrious defender. I mean the apostle Paul. What was his character before his conversion to Christianity? That of a furious bigot, an unrelenting persecutor of those whose religious opinions were different from his own,—a man who “breathed threatenings and slaughter” against others whose only crime was sublime virtue,—a man who delighted in sanguinary scenes, who held the clothes of those who stoned martyrs, gnashing his teeth for vexation all the while, that he could not be more actively engaged in the brutal scene,—a man whose principal delight was in “making havoc of the church,” disturbing domestic privacy, “entering into houses, and halting men and women to prison;” who “punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, persecuted them unto strange cities.”<sup>(w)</sup> How different were his actions and his sentiments after he had been converted, on his way to Damascus, and became “obedient unto the heavenly vision!” Observe how pure, how elevated, how benevolent, how peculiarly fitted to the wants of universal society, are the ethics become of the man who just before found his greatest plea-

(w) Acts vii. 58. viii. 1—3. ix. 1. xxvi. 10, 11. 19.

sure and glory in persecuting and torturing his fellow-creatures ! " Let love be without dissimulation. " Abhor that which is evil, cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love ; in honour preferring one another ; not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord ; rejoicing in hope ; patient in tribulation ; continuing instant in prayer ; distributing to the necessity of saints ; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you ; bless, and curse not. " Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Mind not high things. Be not wise in your own conceits. Live peaceably with all men. Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath. If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."(x) Where, except in the Bible, or in books which inculcate the sentiments of the Bible, will you find such a group of admirable, peace-inspiring, precepts ? Observe, again, how this apostle depicts the sublime importance of charity, or love. " Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries,

(x) Rom. xii. 9-21.

" and all knowledge ; and though I have all faith,  
" so that I could remove mountains, and have not  
" charity, I am nothing. And though I give my  
" body to be burned, and have not charity, it pro-  
" fiteth me nothing." (y) Surely this was not al-  
ways the language of the fanatical persecutor Saul !  
Whence, then, did he derive these elevated senti-  
ments, this preference of universal benevolence to  
the most splendid and miraculous endowments ? Are  
these the notions of a vile impostor, or of a poor de-  
luded enthusiast, or of one whom " much learning  
" has made mad ?" No ; they are the genuine pro-  
ductions of the religion of Jesus, uniformly mani-  
fested in a greater or less degree wherever that reli-  
gion is efficacious ; and proving clearly that that re-  
ligion proceeds from Him who wills the harmony  
and the happiness of the physical and rational world.

Look again at the language of the Divine founder  
of the Christian religion. Read some of his dis-  
courses. Take those, for example, which are re-  
corded in the 5th, 6th, 7th, 10th, and 25th chapters  
of Matthew's Gospel ; and those in the 12th, 14th,  
15th, 16th, and 17th chapters of John's Gospel. I  
know your soul is susceptible of exquisite feelings,  
and that you can readily discern and distinguish the  
good, the beautiful, the pathetic, the sublime, the

(y) 1 Cor. xiii. 1—8.

sincere ; and I therefore may ask you again with confidence, could these admirable and astonishing discourses proceed from the mouth of an impostor ? Could they be the workings of a heated imagination ? Could they proceed from any mere mortal ? It is impossible for any man of correct understanding, and unbiassed mind, to answer these questions in the affirmative.

But we need not stop at an examination of a few discourses of our Lord and his apostles ; we may go much farther, and take in the whole scope, object, and tendency of scripture ; and may boldly affirm, in the language of the poet, that

“ ————— if we trace the globe around  
“ And search from Britain to Japan  
“ There shall be no Religion found  
“ So just to God, so safe for man.”

A religion that comes from heaven may naturally be expected to furnish the most elevated, impressive, and glorious conceptions of the attributes and operations of the Deity. So does the religion of the Bible.

A religion that comes from Heaven should furnish incentives to the most sublime virtue, and the strongest motives to avoid sin : its promises and threatenings should be respectively of the most inviting and alarming kind. Such are the promises and threatenings of the Bible.

A religion that comes from Heaven should teach man his true character, should tell him what he is, and what he may become ; should give him correct estimates of all around him, especially as they relate to morals and happiness. So does the religion of the Bible.

A religion that comes from Heaven should teach the art of " keeping the heart," and regulating the affections. So does the religion of the Bible.

A religion that comes from Heaven, and that is formed for universality, should develope the great principles of social union, should explain and enforce all the relative duties, should perfect and ennable every natural sentiment which tends to make man co-operate with his fellow-creatures for good. So does the religion of the Bible.

A religion that comes from Heaven may naturally be expected to contain new precepts, such as obviously correspond with the object of it. So does the religion of the Bible, and especially that of the *perfective* dispensation in the New Testament, where the precepts tend in an especial manner to "*prepare us for the kingdom of Heaven.*" Here the new precepts point to poorness of spirit, humility, self-abasement, detachment from the world, repentance, faith, forgiveness of injuries, charity. All these were unknown to the Pagan moralists.

A religion that comes from Heaven may be ex-

pected to rest upon some scheme or plan, such as would never have entered the mind of man. So does the Christian religion. Its founder made *his own sufferings and death* a requisite part of his original plan, essential to his mission, and necessary to the salvation of his followers. This certainly surpassed all human conceptions or expectations.

A religion that comes from Heaven should teach the purest and most rational worship. So does the Christian religion. It teaches us that "God is a Spirit, and that they who worship him, must worship him *in spirit and in truth*." These two words exclude formality, hypocrisy, and deadness in devotion, and teach us that God requires of us the sincere worship of the heart.

A religion that comes from Heaven will incessantly invite men thither. So does the Christian religion.

A religion that comes from Heaven, and that is constituted to be universal, should meet man in all directions, and come into contact with him at every point. So does the religion of the Gospel. Its precepts and doctrines are adapted to our advantage in all circumstances of life and conduct. Like the stars "in the glorious firmament of the sky," the precepts and promises applicable to human life are universally scattered over the face of the Scriptures; though, like the stars, they are more thickly grouped, and

shine with more beauty and fulgence in some places than in others. Still the one and the other exist for *our good*, and both may be contemplated as

“ For ever singing as they shine,  
“ The hand that made us is divine.”

Examining the various portions of the word of God under these impressions, and with this view, we shall find that there is a mutual connection and harmony between them. Thus, every precept will be found to have its exemplification ; every command its corresponding benefit ; every want its corresponding prayer ; and the aids of the spirit uniformly offered. Thus, also, every duty is urged by an appropriate motive ; every blessing has its dependent duty ; every trial its adequate support ; every temptation its peculiar “ way of escape ” from it ; every affliction its commensurate consolation ; every situation has suggested its suitable religious employments ; every period in life, and every relation in society, brings with it vocations and difficulties peculiar to itself, all of which are provided for in the richness and exuberance of Scripture. Nay, even in the last great and solemn change, when the friends of a dying Christian show, by their aching hearts and streaming eyes, that earthly hopes are at an end ; when a human creature most needs the consolations and supports of religion, then does the Christian

religion often most manifest its power,—enabling the weeping relatives to feel the acuteness without the bitterness of grief, and “sorrow not as those who are without hope,”—and, at the same time, plucking away the sting of death, and giving the departing saint to feel that when “*flesh and heart fail, God is the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever.* (x)

Such are the benefits, the blessings, and the aids of the Christian religion. It fills the minds of its genuine disciples with true light, it reforms their hearts; it rightly disposes them towards God and their fellow-creatures: it teaches them how to bear prosperity without highmindedness, adversity without murmuring; how humility may exist without meanness, and dignity without pride: it makes them more reasonable in all their actions; and inspires them with fortitude, contentment, devotion, and contempt of the world: it communicates correct notions of the greatness of religion, the sanctity of morality, the vanity of earthly passions, the misery and corruption of our nature, the littleness of every thing but God: it delivers its disciples from the greatest, that is, from moral evils; teaches them the proper use of temporal mercies; and provides for them an inexhaustible and eternal store of intellectual and moral good. If the religion which accomplishes all this be false, where

(x) Psalm lxxiii. 26,

can we seek for truth? If the inestimable advantages it promises are to be despised and rejected, what is there upon or under the earth (and on this hypothesis there is *nothing above it*) that is worth retaining?

Be it recollected, however, and with this remark I shall conclude the present letter, that the enjoyments of the Christian religion are confined exclusively to sincere Christians. "To these enjoyments, therefore, you will necessarily continue a stranger, unless "you resign yourself *wholly* to its power: for the "consolations of religion are reserved to reward, to "sweeten, and to stimulate obedience. Many, without renouncing the profession of Christianity, without formally rejecting its distinguishing doctrines, live in such an habitual violation of its laws, and contradiction to its spirit, that, conscious they have more to fear than to hope from its truth, they are never able to contemplate it without terror. It haunts their imagination instead of tranquillizing their hearts, and hangs with depressing weight on all their enjoyments and pursuits. Their religion, instead of comforting them under their troubles, is itself their greatest trouble, from which they seek refuge in the dissipation and vanity of the world, until the throbs and tumults of conscience force them back upon religion. Thus suspended between opposite powers, the sport of contradictory influences, they are disqualified for the happiness

"of both worlds, and neither enjoy the pleasures of  
"sin, nor the peace of piety. Is it surprising to find a  
"mind thus bewildered in uncertainty, and dissatisfied  
"with itself; court deception, and embrace with ea-  
"gerness every pretext to mutilate the claims, and  
"enervate the authority, of Christianity ; forgetting  
"that it is of the very essence of the religious prin-  
"ciple to preside and control, and that it is impossible,  
"to serve God and mammon ? It is this class of per-  
"sons who are chiefly in danger of being entangled  
"in the snares of infidelity. Yet the champions of  
"infidelity have much more reason to be ashamed  
"than to boast of such converts." (a)

I am, &c.

(a) See a very profound and eloquent discourse entitled " Modern Infidelity considered with respect to its Influence on Society," by my most highly esteemed friend, Robert Hall, A.M. This author, in the preface to the valuable publication just quoted, pledged himself "to enter into a fuller and more particular examination of the Infidel Philosophy, both with respect to its speculative principles, and its practical effects; its influence on society and the individual;" and every one who has resigned himself to the splendor, and magic, and force of his eloquence, an eloquence, which like the solar light warms while it illuminates, and is alike calculated to delight the imagination, to enrich the understanding, and to amend the heart,—must lament that he has not long before now redeemed this pledge. O ! why will the most captivating, energetic, and profound preacher and religious writer now living, rest satisfied with giving to the world scarcely any but fugitive publications of temporary interest, the

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whole of which it is already difficult to collect,—when all who know him, or who are able to appreciate the value of his efforts, are anxiously anticipating the period when he will favour the public with some work of respectable magnitude and permanent interest, which shall enlighten and instruct its successive readers for ages to come?

## LETTER X.

*On the Inspiration of Scripture.*

THE various trains of argument and observation I have laid open to you in my former letters have, I hope, fully convinced you that the several books of Scripture deserve credence as genuine and authentic: but, in order that the truths and doctrines they contain may press upon your mind with their full weight, it is necessary you should have a conviction of their Divine authority. A firm and cordial belief of the INSPIRATION of the Bible is, indeed, of the highest moment: for unless you are persuaded that those who were employed in the composition of the respective books were entirely preserved from error, a conviction of their honesty and integrity will be but of little avail. Honest men may err, may point out the wrong track, however unwilling they may be to deceive; and if those who have penned what we receive as revelation are thus open to mistakes, we are still left to make the voyage of life in the midst of rocks, and shelves, and quicksands, with a compass vacillating and useless, and our pole-star enveloped in mists and obscurity.

But some of these writers assure us that “*all* scripture is given us by inspiration of God;” (b) meaning, at least, the Jewish scriptures; a declaration which deserves attention on the score of the general veracity by which we have already shown their assertions are always marked. Still, as a like claim is made by writers who, it has been ascertained, were wicked and designing, let us inquire on what grounds and to what extent the divine inspiration of the Bible ought to be admitted.

Theologians have enumerated several kinds of Inspiration: such as an *inspiration of superintendency*, in which God so influences and directs the mind of any person as to keep him more secure from error in some complex discourse, than he would have been merely by the use of his natural faculties:—*plenary superintendent inspiration*, which excludes any mixture of error whatever from the performance so superintended:—*inspiration of elevation*, where the faculties act in a regular, and, as it should seem, in a common manner, yet are raised to an extraordinary degree, so that the composition shall, upon the whole, have more of the true sublime, or pathetic, than natural genius could have given:—and, *inspiration of suggestion*, in which the use of the faculties is super-

posed, and God does, as it were, speak directly to the mind, making such discoveries to it as it could not otherwise have obtained, and dictating the very words in which such discoveries are to be communicated, if they are designed as a message to others.

It is not my purpose to enter into any inquiry how far different portions of scripture were composed under one or other of these kinds of inspiration. I have enumerated them merely to show you that those, who contend that scripture is inspired, have not arrived at their decision by a gross and careless process, but by sedulous, critical, and discriminating investigation: I mean, however, to affirm, and I trust the references I have thrown at the foot of the page, together with a few particular arguments I shall advance, will prove to you the reasonableness of admitting that, while the authors employed in the composition of the Bible exercised generally their own reason and judgment, (c) the Spirit of God effectually stirred them up to write; (d) appointed to each his proper portion and topic, corresponding with his natural talents, and the necessities of the church in his time; (e) enlightened their minds and gave them a distinct view of the truths they were to

(c) Ps. xlv. 1. Mark xii. 36. Luke i. 3. Acts i. 1. 1 Pet. i. 11.

(d) 2 Pet. i. 21.

(e) 2 Pet. i. 21; Matt. xiv. 15.

deliver; (f) strengthened and refreshed their memories to recollect whatever they had seen or heard, the insertion of which in their writings would be beneficial; (g) directed them to select from a multitude of facts what was proper for the edification of the church, and neither more nor less; (h) excited afresh in their minds such images and ideas as had been laid up in their memories, and directed them to other ends and purposes than themselves would ever have done of their own accord; (i) suggested and imprinted upon their minds such matters as could not have been discovered or known by reason, observation, or information, but were subjects of pure revelation; (k) superintended every particular writer, so as to render him infallible in his matter, words, and order, especially whenever they related to facts, discourses, or doctrines, the communication of which is the great object of scripture; thus rendering the whole canon at any given period, an infallible

(f) Jer. i. 11—16. xiii. 9—14. Ezek. iv. 4—8. Dan. viii. 15—19. ix. 22—27. x. 1. 8. Amos. vii. 7, 8. viii. 2. Zech. i. 19—21. iv. 11—14. v. 6. John xvi. 13. Eph. iii. 3, 4. 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

(g) Luke i. 9. John xiv. 26. Jer. xxxi. 3

(h) John xx. 30, 31. xxi. 25. Rom. iv. 23, 24. xv. 4. 1 Cor. x. 6—11.

(i) Amos i and ix. Acts xvii. 28. 1 Cor. xv. 33. Tit. i. 12.

(k) Gen. i. ii. iii. Lev. xxvi. Isa. xli. 22, 23. xlvi. 21, xlvi. 9, 10. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

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guide to true holiness and everlasting happiness. (1)

Now, that the Scriptures were actually dictated by an inspiration of this kind may, I think, be inferred both from the reasonableness and from the necessity of the thing. It is *reasonable* that the sentiments and doctrines, developed in the Scriptures, should be suggested to the minds of the writers by the Supreme Being himself. They relate principally to matters concerning which the communicating information to men is worthy of God : and the more important the information communicated, the more it is calculated to impress mankind, to preserve from moral error, to stimulate to holiness, to guide to happiness, the more reasonable is it to expect that God should make the communication in a manner free from every admixture or risque of error. Indeed the notion of inspiration enters essentially into our ideas of a Revelation from God ; so that to deny inspiration is tantamount to affirming there is no Revelation. And why should it be denied ? Is man out of the reach of him who created him ? Has he, who gave man his intellect, no means of enlarging or illuminating that intellect ? And is it beyond his power to illuminate and inform in an especial manner

(1) Deut. viii. 1—4. Ps. xix. 7—11. exix. Matt. xxii. 29. Luke xiv. 25—31. John v. 30. Rom. xv. 4. 2 Tim. iii. 15—17. 2 Pet. i. 19.

the intellects of some chosen individuals,—or contrary to his wisdom, to preserve them from error when they communicate to others, either orally or by writing, the knowledge he imparted to them, not merely for their own benefit, but for that of the world at large?

But farther, Inspiration is *necessary*. The necessity of Revelation I have shown in a former letter; and the same reasoning, in connection with what I have just remarked, establishes the necessity of inspiration. Besides this, the subjects of Scripture render inspiration necessary. Some past facts recorded in the Bible could not possibly have been known had not God revealed them. Many things are recorded there as future, that is, are predicted, which God alone could foreknow and foretel, which notwithstanding came to pass, and which, therefore, were foretold under divine inspiration. Others, again, are far above human capacity, and could never have been discovered by men: these, therefore, must have been delivered by divine inspiration. The authoritative language of scripture, too, argues the necessity of inspiration, admitting the veracity of the writers. They propose things not as matters for consideration, but for adoption: they do not leave us the alternative of receiving or rejecting; do not present us with their own thoughts; but exclaim "*Thus saith the Lord,*" and on that ground demand our assent. They must, of necessity, therefore, speak and write as

they "were inspired by the Holy Ghost," or be impostors: and the last supposition is precluded by reasonings which I have again and again brought forward in these letters.

Very striking proofs of the inspiration of the Scriptures might be deduced from a consideration of their sublimity, their union of perspicuity with profundity, their piety, their pure and holy tendency, their efficacy, their harmony, and their miraculous preservation. But I shall leave you to reflect upon these at your leisure, and proceed to lay before you, as an argument of no small weight, the testimony of those who lived nearest the apostolic times, on this point. They may naturally be expected, so far I mean as is independent of the written word, to know more of the mind of those who, in regard to religious topics, had "the mind of Christ," than any christians in subsequent ages. Consider in this view the weight of the following quotations:

1. CLEMENS ROMANUS says that "the apostles preached the gospel, being filled with the *Holy Spirit*: that the Scriptures are the true word of "the Spirit; and that Paul wrote to the Corinthians "things that were *true*, by the aid of the Spirit."

2. JUSTIN MARTYR says "that the gospels were "written by men full of the *Holy Ghost*, and that "the sacred writers were moved by inspiration."

3. IRENÆUS says that "all the apostles as well as

“ Paul received the Gospel by divine revelation ; and  
“ that by the will of God they delivered it to us as  
“ the foundation and pillar of our faith : that the  
“ scriptures were dictated by the Spirit of God, and  
“ therefore it is wickedness to contradict them, and  
“ sacrilege to make any the least alteration in them.”

4. CLEMENS ALEXANDRINUS says,—“ we that  
“ have the Scriptures are taught of God ; that the  
“ Scriptures are established by the authority of  
“ God ; that the whole Scripture is the law of God ;  
“ and that they are all divine.”

5. ORIGEN says that “ the Scriptures proceeded  
“ from the Holy Spirit ; that there is not one tittle  
“ in them but what expresses a divine wisdom ; that  
“ there is nothing in the Law, or the Prophets, or the  
“ Gospels, or the Epistles, which did not proceed  
“ from the fullness of the Spirit ; that we ought with  
“ all the faithful to say that the Scriptures are di-  
“ viney inspired ; that the gospels were admitted as  
“ divine in all the churches of God ; that the Scrip-  
“ tures are no other than the organs of God ; that,  
“ if a man would not confess himself to be an infidel,  
“ he must admit the inspiration of the Scriptures.”

6. TERTULLIAN lays it down as a fundamental  
principle in disputing with heretics “ that the truth  
“ of doctrines is to be determined by Scripture ; ”  
and affirms most positively “ that scripture is the  
“ basis of faith ; that all christians prove their doe-

"trines out of the Old and New Testament; and  
"that the majesty of God dictated what Paul wrote."

7. EUSEBIUS quotes with approbation a writer more ancient than himself, who says, "they who corrupt the sacred Scriptures abolish the standard of the ancient faith, neglecting the words of the divine writings, out of regard to their own reasonings;" and afterwards, "that they either do not believe that the Holy Spirit uttered the Divine Scriptures, and then they are *infidels*; or think themselves wiser than the Spirit, and in that case seem to be possessed."

8. THEOPHILUS ANTIOCHENUS says that "the evangelists and apostles wrote by the same Spirit that inspired the prophets."

9. Nearly all the other christian writers in the first three centuries, whose performances have wholly or partly reached us, speak of the Scriptures as *divine*, call them the *Holy* Scriptures, the *sacred fountain*, the *divine fountains of salvation*, &c. evidently implying their inspiration. And in those early ages the whole church agreed in sentiment, that no book should be received into the Canon of Scripture of whose *inspiration* there was any doubt.(m)

(m) The curious reader may consult farther the testimonies collected by Dr. Whithby, vol. i. Pref., by Dr. Lardner in the 2d Part of his Credibility, Dr. Doddridge in his Lectures on Divinity, and in his Family Expositor, vol. iii.

Thus, then, we see, that in the primitive ages the universal opinion was in favour of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Let us next inquire how far this opinion grows naturally out of an examination of the Scriptures themselves. Considered in relation to the present subject, the books of Scripture fall under three classes : the prophetical books ; the historical books of the Old Testament ; and the New Testament, being in part historical, in part doctrinal.

Now, as to the prophetical books, their divine authority and their inspiration follow at once from the completion of several of the predictions they contain : the entire fulfilment of the whole is not essential to the argument.

The inspiration of the New Testament may be inferred from the language of our Lord, and that of the apostles. Thus, Jesus Christ promised extraordinary assistance to his apostles. He promised them “ the “ Comforter,” “ the Holy Spirit,” “ the Spirit of “ Truth,” who should “ testify of him,” should “ teach “ them all things, bring all things to their remem-“ brance whatsoever Christ had said unto them, should “ guide them into all truth, should abide with them “ for ever, and show them things to come.”(n) A-gain, he says “ when the Comforter is come, whom “ I will send to you from the Father, even the Spirit

(n) John xiv. 16—26. xvi. 13.

“ of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he  
“ shall testify of me ; and ye also [being so assisted]  
“ shall bear witness.”(o) From these passages it is  
but fair and reasonable to conclude, that the aid of  
this Heavenly Guide was to be vouchsafed them on  
all suitable occasions ; and surely no occasions could  
render it more expedient than when they were en-  
gaged in delivering *written* instructions, whether in  
the form of Gospels or of Epistles, which were in-  
tended for the edification of the christian church  
till “ time should be no longer.” In fact, the Spi-  
rit could not abide with *them* for ever, in relation to  
the church, in any other way than by preserving the  
word they delivered from such human or diabolical  
depreciation and corruption as might render it inju-  
rious instead of being salutary.

It will also be worth our while to notice the re-  
markable language in which Jesus Christ pro-  
mises his apostles the extraordinary assistance of  
the Spirit while they are defending his cause be-  
fore magistrates. “ Settle it therefore in your  
“ hearts not to meditate before what ye shall an-  
“ swer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom  
“ which all your adversaries shall not be able to gain-  
“ say or résist. Take no thought how or what ye  
“ shall speak ; for it shall be given you in that same

(o) John xv. 26, 27.

"hour what ye shall speak ; for it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."(p) If this were to be the case when they pleaded before magistrates, how much more reason is there to conclude, that when they were writing for the use of all future generations, it was not so much they who wrote, as the *Spirit of the Father* who dictated to them, and thus *wrote by them*. For the occasion is evidently much more important in the latter instance than in the former : an error in their writings would have a much more extensive, permanent, and injurious influence than any error that could occur in a pleading or argument, necessarily of transient impression, before a magistrate.

In estimating the authority claimed by the *eight* writers of the New Testament, we must not only consider their unbroken, unimpeachable integrity, but that *five* of them were of the number of the apostles to whom the promises just cited were made. Of the other three, one, namely Luke, is generally admitted to have been of the *seventy* disciples sent out by Christ, and who received the promise of divine superintendence and inspiration recorded in his Gospel.(q) With regard to Mark, if his own immediate inspiration cannot be established, that of his Gospel can, since it has never been questioned that

(p) Luke xxi. 14, 15. Matt. x. 19, 20. Mark xiii. 11.

(q) Luke xii. 11, 12. See also Luke x. 16.

he wrote under the superintendence of Peter, an inspired apostle. There then remains only Paul, who repeatedly and solemnly asserts his own inspiration, and his equality in every respect with all the other apostles; appealing to miracles publicly wrought by himself in proof of his divine commission.

That the apostles themselves had a full persuasion that they wrote under Divine inspiration is evident from a great variety of texts; to some of the most important of which I shall refer you,(r) that you may consult them carefully, and allow them their full impression upon your mind. You will find, too, that the apostles considered themselves as communicating to the world a *perpetual* rule of faith and practice; which would be comprehended by all except the finally impenitent. If, say they, “if *our* Gospel be “under a veil, it is veiled to those that are perish-“ing.”(s) On these accounts, as it should seem, they preferred themselves before the *Prophets*, saying,(t) “God hath set in the church, first, *Apostles*; secondly,

(r) 1 Cor. ii. 10—16. iii. 21—23. xi. 23. xiv. 37. 2 Cor. ii. 10. iii. 5, 6. iv. 8. xi. 7. xiii. 3. Gal. i. 11, 12. Ephes. iii. 3—5. 10. iv. 11, 12. 1 Tim. i. 11. 1 Pet. i. 12. 21. 2 Pet. iii. 2, 15, 16. John x. 35. 1 John ii. 20. iv. 6. Rev. i. 1, &c. 1 Thess. i. 5. 2 Thess. ii. 13.

(s) Εἰ δὲ καὶ εἴς κεκαλυμφέντος τὸ εὐαγγελίον ηὔσιν, εὐ τοῖς απόλλημασι εἴς κεκαλυμφέντος. 2 Cor. iv. 3.

(t) 1 Cor. xii. 28. Ephes. ii. 20.

*Prophets; thirdly, Teachers :*" language, which could not properly have been employed had the apostles been inspired only to preach, and not to write ; for in that case they would manifestly be *inferior* to the Prophets, who, in their writings as well as their oral denunciations, " spake as they were moved by the " Holy Ghost."

The preceding are arguments for the *general* inspiration of the writers of the New Testament : but it also behoves me farther to remark, that the care with which the most voluminous writer among the apostles distinguishes between those instances in which he delivers the dictates of the Spirit, and those in which he presents merely his own private judgment, leads us naturally to infer that wherever he has not made such distinction he ought to be understood as teaching with Divine authority. Thus, when he treats of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the single and the married state in the perilous times in which he lived, he says, " I speak this by *permission*, not by " "*commandment*." Again, a little farther on, " unto the " "*married I command, yet not I, but the Lord.*" And soon afterwards, " to the rest speak *I, not the Lord.*" Again, (v) " concerning virgins, I have no command- " "*ment of the Lord; yet I give my judgment.*" And once more, at the conclusion of the same chapter, " She

(v) 1 Cor. vii. 6, 10, 12, 25, 40.

" is happier if she so abide, *after my judgment*; and I *think* also that (in this particular) I have the " Spirit of God." Is it not absurd to imagine that an apostle, who guards his readers *five* times in one chapter against making his private judgment of equal authority with commandments dictated to him by God, would on all other occasions assume the authority of a divine and inspired teacher, without a full and perfect consciousness that he had a just claim to it? (w)

These observations will, I trust, convince you that the historical and doctrinal parts of the New Testament, and the prophetical portions of both the Old and New Testaments, contain, in the complete sense of the phrase, "*the word of God*." It remains that I state to you at least one cogent argument for admitting that the *whole* of the received Jewish scriptures is entitled to the same character, and of course to the same submission of intellect and of heart. This I shall lay before you in the language of Dr. Doddridge in his valuable Dissertation on the Inspiration of the Scriptures: "The inspiration, and consequently the genuineness and credibility, of the *Old* Testament, may be certainly inferred from that of the *New*, because our Lord and his apostles were so far from charging the Scribes and Pharisees (who on all pro-

(w) See also 2.Cer. viii. 8.

per occasions are censured so freely) with having introduced into the sacred volume any merely human compositions; that, on the contrary, they not only recommend a diligent and constant perusal of these scriptures, as of the greatest importance to men's eternal happiness, but speak of them as *divine oracles*, and as written by the extraordinary influence of the Holy Spirit upon the minds of the authors.

" I desire that the following list of scriptures may be attentively consulted and reflected on in this view. I might have added a great many more, indeed *several hundreds*, in which the sacred writers of the New Testament argue from those of the Old in such a manner, as nothing could have justified but a firm persuasion that they were *divinely inspired*. Now as the Jews always allowed that " the testimony of an *approved prophet* was sufficient to *confirm the mission* of one who was supported by it," so I think every reasonable man will readily conclude, that no *inspired person* can erroneously attest *another* to be *inspired*; and indeed the very definition of *plenary inspiration* absolutely excludes any room for cavilling on so plain a head. I throw the particular passages which I choose to mention into the margin below; (x) and he must be a very indolent inquirer into

(x) John v. 39. Matt. iv. 4. 7. 10. Mark xii. 24. Luke x. 26, 27. Matt. v. 17, 18. xxi. 42. xxii. 29. 31. 43. xxiv. 15. xxvi. 54, 56. Luke i. 67. 69. 70. xvi. 31. xxiv. 25. 27. John

a question of so much importance, who does not think it worth his while to turn carefully to them; unless he have already such a conviction of the argument that it should need no farther to be illustrated or confirmed."

Here, then, may safely terminate our inquiry into the *inspiration* of scripture. We have ascertained that it is the Word of God; and, if we read it attentively, we shall soon find it profitable "for doctrine, "for instruction, for reproof." Let us, therefore, my friend, believe and rejoice "that the grace of "God which bringeth salvation hath thus appeared "to all men; to the end that *denying ungodliness* "and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteous- "ly, and godlily, in this present world; looking for "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of "the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ."(y)

vi. 31. x. 35. Acts ii. 16. 25. iii. 22. 24. iv. 25. xvii. 11. xviii.  
24. 28. xxviii. 25. Rom. iii. 2. 10. ix. 17. 25. 27. 29. x. 5. 11.  
16. xv. 4. xvi. 26. 1. Cor. x. 11. 2 Cor. iv. 13. vi. 16, 17.  
Gal. iii. 8. 1 Tim. v. 18. 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16. Heb. i. 1. 5—13;  
iii. 7. Jam. ii. 8. iv. 5, 6. 1 Pet. i. 10—12. 2 Pet. i. 19—21.

(y) Titus ii. 11, 12, 13.

## LETTER XI.

*On some of the most plausible Objections urged against the Truth and Divine Authority of the Scriptures.*

IT has been my object, in the preceding letters, to convince you that the collection of writings received by christians as sacred and authoritative, are indeed genuine, authentic, and inspired. I shall be happy if this great object be attained. At all events, I trust I have shown that the Christian religion has the strongest *probability* in its favour ; and, if that be the case, you will at once see that the rejection of it is the height of folly. In the economy of human life we act almost entirely upon probabilities ; and in most instances I believe it will be found that the more important the tendency or the result of a particular action or series of actions may be, the slighter need be the preponderance of probability to determine our adopting it. It is probable, for example, that we may be heirs at law to a valuable estate : therefore we examine into the legal instruments which ascertain our title to such estate. It is probable a particular line of conduct will be successful : therefore we pursue it. It is probable a certain com-

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mercial speculation will be productive : therefore we put it in practice. It is probable a certain regimen will be highly injurious to our health : therefore we abandon it. It is probable a particular medicine will be beneficial to the constitution : therefore we have recourse to it. It is probable the house we inhabit will fall : therefore we quit it. And thus it might be shown in a variety of other instances, that where there appears a presumption however low on one side of an inquiry, and none on the other,—or where there appears a preponderancy however slight in favour of one side,—this determines the point even in matters of speculation, and usually impels to action in matters of practice. But alas ! this wise and prudential rule of conduct is only applied *generally* in regard to the things of the present world : for although it is probable, nay, *infinitely* probable, that the Christian religion is true, that the evils against which we are warned in the Bible will be our portion unless we “flee from the wrath to come,” that the ineffable and interminable happiness it promises believers may be ours unless we thoughtlessly or contemptuously spurn it from us ; yet, in direct opposition to the conduct wise persons adopt in every other concern, men disbelieve the evidence, despise the warnings, laugh at the threatenings, reject the blessings, held out to them in the scriptures,

go through life wrapt in an impenetrable insensibility to eternal things ; and at death “ rush upon the thick “ bosses of God’s buckler,” and plunge naked into “ fierceness of darkness,” instead of bathing in those perennial “ rivers of pleasure ” which flow from the throne of God, and to which the condescending Deity had invited them !

We do not deny that the scheme of revelation has its difficulties : for if the things of nature are often difficult to comprehend, it would be strange indeed if *supernatural* matters were so simple, and obvious, and suited to finite capacities, as never to startle or puzzle us at all. Origen remarked, with his usual sagacity, that “ he who believes the scripture to have proceeded from him who is the Author of Nature, may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the constitution of nature ; ” and this obviously suggests the reflection, that he, who denies the Bible to have come from God on account of these difficulties, may, for exactly the same reason, deny that the world was formed by him. Indeed the Bible could not have been, as many declarations included in it show it to be,—*a touchstone by which to try men’s honest dispositions*, (z) were it

(z) Ut ita sermo evangeli tanquam lapis esset Lydius ad quem ingenia sanabilia explorarentur. Grotius De Ver. R. C. lib. ii. sect. 19.

so free from difficulties that every man's faith would be *inevitably* excited on the first perusal.

To reject christianity, therefore, on account of its difficulties, is unreasonable ; because it is to reject it for possessing what its own writings declare to be essential to its nature and purpose : and to proceed by way of objections drawn from these difficulties is *unfair*; because it is walking in a path in which a man can never be stopped unless he *please*, and in which, though he travel for ever, it is impossible he can arrive at truth and certainty. Let him propose a thousand objections in succession, and suppose nine hundred and ninety nine of them to be answered satisfactorily; still the one which he retains, and which he supposes to be unanswerable because he has not received an answer to it, will be deemed a sufficient plea to justify his continuing incredulous. He will boast of this single objection, though probably the point to which it relates may be one which it is impossible for us to place in a proper light, unless we could see and know as God does. " Many and painful are the researches usually necessary to be made for settling points of this kind. Pertness and ignorance may ask a question in three lines, which it will cost learning and ingenuity thirty pages to answer. When this is done, the same question shall be triumphantly asked again the next year, as if nothing had ever been written upon the subject. And as people

In general, for one reason or another, like short objections better than long answers, in this mode of disputation (if it can be styled such) the odds must ever be against us; and we must be content with those for our friends, who have honesty and erudition, candour and patience, to study both sides of the question.”(a)

You must not, however, infer from these observations, that I wish to avoid all discussion of the objections urged against scripture. They are it is true too multifarious in their nature to render it possible we should meet them all; and many of them would lead us into too wide a field of inquiry, to admit of their being considered in the compass of a letter. Still it may be proper to select a few which you have probably heard advanced, and to present you with such answers as have been given, or may be given to them, that you may judge how trifling some of them are, and how satisfactory solutions may be furnished to others, the most specious and plausible that have been brought forward.

OBJ. I. It has been thought strange that God should select, as the principal recipients of his favours, so obscure a people as the ancient Jews were; a nation described by Voltaire as “wretched, ever ignorant, “and vulgar, and strangers to the arts.”

The following reply was made to Voltaire; and it

(a) Horne's Letters on Infidelity. p. 82.

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is unnecessary we should seek for any other, until the disciples of Voltaire and Hume shall have shown us that this is weak and unsatisfactory. “ Does it become you, a writer of the eighteenth century, to charge the ancient Hebrews with ignorance ? A people, who, while your barbarous ancestors, whilst even the Greeks and Latins, wandering in the woods, could scarcely procure for themselves clothing and a settled subsistence, already possessed all arts of necessity, and some of mere pleasure ; who not only knew how to feed and rear cattle, till the earth, work up wood, stone, and metals, weave clothes, dye wool, embroider stuffs, polish and engrave on precious stones ; but who even then, adding to manual arts those of taste and refinement, surveyed land, appointed their festivals according to the motions of the heavenly bodies, and ennobled their solemnities by the pomp of ceremonies, by the sound of instruments, music, and dancing ; who even then committed to writing the history of the origin of the world, that of their own nation, and their ancestors ; who had poets and writers skilled in all the sciences then known, great and brave commanders, a pure worship, just laws, a wise form of government ; in short, this was *the only one of all ancient nations that has left us authentic monuments of genius and of literature.* Can this nation be justly charged with *ignorance and inurbanity?* ”

OBJ. II. The books of Moses are scarcely mentioned by any ancient pagan writers; a circumstance which seems irreconcileable with the extreme antiquity assigned to them by Jewish and Christian authors.

They are, however, noticed by *some* writers of celebrity, as I showed in the letter on the genuineness of scripture; so that this objection is overthrown. But, even though reference could not be made to a single heathen author who speaks of Moses, it would be unfair to infer from thence that Moses never existed, and that the books distinguished by his name are spurious. Neither Herodotus nor Thucydides ever mention Rome, though the conquests of the Roman people were in the times of those historians extended far and wide: would it not be thought extremely unreasonable to affirm, on this account, that the received histories of Rome are fabulous?

OBJ. III. The massacres and desolations which marked the expulsion of the Canaanites from their land, and led to the establishment of the Israelites in it, could never be authorized by the good and merciful governor of the universe; and, of consequence, those parts of the Old Testament history which relate these horrid stories must be rejected.

So have argued Morgan, Tindal, Bolingbroke, Paine, and many others; yet it may be shown that these transactions were calculated for a beneficial purpose, even for the general advantage of mankind;

and were therefore neither inconsistent with the justice of God, nor with the usual proceedings of Divine providence. Let the objectors to this portion of the Old Testament history consider,

1. That God as the offended Creator of the Canaanites had a right to their forfeited lives, and therefore might as well destroy them and their posterity by the sword of the Israelites, as by famine, pestilence, fire and brimstone rained from heaven, or any other calamity appearing more obviously to come from himself.

2. The unparalleled wickedness of this people, especially as aggravated by the destruction of Sodom, was such as made the execution inflicted upon them a useful lesson to neighbouring nations.(b)

3. The people of those ages were affected by no proof of the power of the gods which they worshipped, so deeply as by their giving them victory in war. Hence, the destruction of the Canaanites by the Israelites tended to convince surrounding nations, and all who were observers and spectators of what passed, 1st. That the God of Israel was a real God: 2dly, That the gods which other nations worshipped were either no gods, or had no power against the God of Israel. 3dly, That it was he, and he alone, who had both the power and the will to exterminate from

(b) Compare Gen. xv. 16. Lev. xviii. 20—28. Jude i. 4—7. Wisd. xii. 8—7. Acts xiii. 19. Judges ii. 1—5, 19—23.

before his face both nations and individuals, who gave themselves up to the crimes and abominations for which the Canaanites could not but be notorious. Destruction from an earthquake, or a plague, might not have been attributed to divine agency at all, or not to the interposition of the God of Israel.

4. Had not the extermination been complete, those old inhabitants which were left might have seduced the new comers by degrees into the same crimes and corruptions. Vice, and especially that of the licentious kind, is astonishingly infectious; of which striking proofs are furnished in the last of the chapters just quoted.

5. That the punishment was preceded by mercy: the forbearance of God had been manifested towards their "abominable *customs*" long, and the Divine judgments were not executed till their "wickedness "was full."

6. This signal exercise of Divine punishment is accompanied by evidence tending to show that God's abhorrence and treatment of crimes is impartial, without distinction, and without respect of nations, or persons. It served likewise as an awful lesson even to the "Jews, the people of God" themselves; they being over and over again reminded, that, notwithstanding they were the appointed instruments of extermination, if they followed similar practices they must expect a like fate. "Ye shall not walk in the

way of the nations which I cast out before you : for they committed all those things, and therefore I abhorred them : as the nations which the Lord destroyed before your face, so *shall ye perish*, because ye were not obedient to the voice of the Lord your God."—The Israelites would thus be more strongly impressed with an abhorrence of the abominations of idolatry, and this impression would subserve the design of keeping them a *distinct people*, adhering to the worship of the true God, so beneficial to them in particular, and ultimately so gracious to mankind in general.

7. The miracles wrought in favour of the Israelites, not only at their coming out of Egypt, but at their entrance on Canaan, proved that they were indeed commissioned as God's executioners ; and consequently that their conduct was not to be a model for conquerors in ordinary cases.

8. We may remark, farther, that had any among the Canaanites surrendered themselves at discretion to the God of Israel, a new case would have arisen not expressly provided for in the law, in which, it is probable, God, upon being consulted by Urim and Thummim, would have spared the lives of such penitents ; and either have incorporated them with the Israelites by circumcision, or have ordered them a settlement in some neighbouring country, as the family of Rahab seems to have had.

But it may be objected, after all, that these arguments do not show that it is not repugnant to God's moral justice "to doom to destruction the "crying or smiling *infants* of the Canaanites." To this we reply,

9. Why is it not maintained repugnant to his moral justice, that he should suffer crying or smiling infants to be swallowed up by an earthquake, drowned by an inundation, consumed by a fire, starved by famine, or destroyed by pestilence? The earth, at the command of God, opened, and swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones. This, as well as the destruction of the Canaanites, is deemed so repugnant to God's moral justice, that infidels spurn, as spurious, the book in which the circumstance is related. When Catania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally destroyed by earthquakes, men, with their wives, their sons, and their little ones, were swallowed up alive: why do not these inquirers spurn, as spurious, the book of nature, in which these facts are written? The latter circumstances are as apparent infringements upon the moral justice of God as the former; and a person would just as forcibly, upon this ground, argue against the latter being facts as against the former. Besides it should be recollected, with respect to "crying and smiling infants," that their early death, so far from being a punishment, as

these objectors represent it, might be an act of the greatest mercy, since it might save them from the dreadful future punishment due to the actual guilt they would probably have incurred had they reached maturity.(c)

OBJ. IV. The story of Abraham's offering up his only son Isaac is so highly unnatural, that neither it nor the book which advances it as true can possibly be reckoned credible.

There is nothing so very unreasonable in this story as the objectors seem to imagine. Abraham had himself received so many divine communications, and had been acquainted with so many which had been made to his ancestors, that he could easily ascertain whether the command really came from God ; and God could manifestly accompany it by such marks of his power and will, as would leave Abraham no room to entertain a single doubt about it. Abraham could as little doubt of God's right to Isaac's life, nay, the youth himself could as little doubt it, as of his care of him in another state. These were essential parts of the patriarchal religion. Still it must be acknowledged, that great faith was required in Abraham, before he could overcome his natural affection and tenderness for Isaac by a principle of obedience to God, and trust God for the accomplishment of his promise when he commanded him to destroy the only apparent means of accom-

(c). Pantologia, art. *Cahanites*.

plishing it. Had not Abraham been highly advanced in faith and obedience, he could not have sustained so severe a trial; but such a trial would greatly confirm both. And thus this history is so far from being liable to objection, that it is peculiarly conformable to those methods, which mere reason and experience dictate as the proper ones for advancing and perfecting true religion in the soul. When the typical nature of the whole is also considered, it seems very difficult indeed to question the divine authority of the appointment. And in the previous steps over which Abraham passed in order to obtain the blessings conferred upon him, we have a striking adumbration and example of that faith, patience, and gradual advancement in the spiritual life, which are essential to all those who hope to be "blessed with faithful Abraham."

As to the particular cavil drawn from the supposed delusive declaration of Abraham to his servants, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and *come again* "to you;" it receives an obvious reply in the language of the apostle Paul. Abraham knew and most probably *believed* that "God was able to raise his son up, "even from the dead;"(d) and therefore that he should return to his servants with his sacrificed though living son.

OBJ. V. The Mosaic chronology is unworthy of

(d) Gen. xxii, 5. Heb. xi, 19.

credit, since it makes the era of the creation only about 4000 years earlier than the Christian era; while the established chronology of the Chinese carries us back to a point of time earlier by many thousands of years than that assigned by Moses to the creation.

That this objection may be of any weight we must give greater credit to monstrous chronologies, containing nothing but names without actions, than to regular methodical histories, which relate in succession all the most important events occurring amongst a particular people for thousands of years;—we must forget that the Chinese pretensions are inconsistent with themselves;—we must forget that it has been proved that the earliest Chinese observations are those of two fixed stars, one in the winter solstice, the other in the vernal equinox, in the reign of their king *Yao*, who lived after the Mosaic date of the General Deluge, that is, two thousand three hundred and fifty seven years before Christ; (e) we must forget that Cassini assigned the date of another of their most early observations to be only two thousand and twelve years before Christ; (f) assuming the correctness of the Chinese accounts of those observations. To give force to this objection, we must, farther, disregard the testimony of M. de Guignes, who has very recently

(e) *Bianchini Histor. Univers.* c. 17.

(f) *Burn's Officer's Complete Armour*, p. 32.

shown most satisfactorily, that the existence of the Chinese *empire* cannot be traced farther back than five hundred and twenty nine years before Christ ;(g) and we must equally disregard the similarly decisive evidence of President Goguet in the following passage :

“ What dependence can we place upon the certainty of Chinese chronology for the early times, when we see these people unanimously avow, that one of their greatest monarchs, interested in the destruction of the ancient traditions, and of those who preserved them, caused *all* the books which did not treat of agriculture, or of medicine, or of divination, to be burnt ; and applied himself, for many years, to destroy whatever could recall the knowledge of the times anterior to his reign ? About forty years after his death, they wanted to re-establish the historical documents. For that purpose, they gathered together, say they, the *hearsays* of old men. They discovered, it is added, some fragments of books which had escaped the general conflagration. They joined these various scraps together as they could, and vainly endeavoured to compose of them a regular history. It was not, however, till more than 150 years after the destruction of all the monuments, that is to say, till the year 87 before Christ, that a complete body

(g) De Guignes' *Voyages à Peking*, &c. tom. i.

of the ancient history appeared. The author himself who composed it, *Sse-Ma-tsiene*, had the candour to own, that he had not found it possible to *ascend with certainty eight hundred years beyond the times in which he wrote*. Such is the unanimous confession of the Chinese.”(h)

It is not a little curious, however, to mark the different ways in which unbelievers attack the authority of Scripture, in respect of the age it gives to the world. *Voltaire* is fiery, and even furious, in contending for the superior antiquity given by the Chinese, while *Laplace* insinuates, as if almost unconscious he was making any such insinuation, that the world cannot be above *half* as old as Moses makes it, and hunts about, very philosophically, for reasons to explain “la nouveauté du monde moral, “ dont les monumens ne remontent guère au-delà de “trois mille ans.”(i)

OBJ. VI. The Scriptures contain so many inconsistencies, contradictions, and absurdities, that it is difficult to think them authentic, much less inspired.

This objection presents itself with a very formidable aspect, and will, therefore, require something more than a mere glance at it. Let me remark then, first, as to those few and small apparent inconsistencies

(h) Goguet's Origin of Laws, Dr. Henry's translat. vol. iii.

(i) Expos. du Système du Monde, liv. iv. chap. 4.

which are supposed to run counter to the notion of inspiration, or, at least, to restrict the inspiration of the scriptures to its lowest sense, that they decrease daily, in proportion as the inquiries of learned men are extended farther ; and that, even if, in the originals, the scriptures were perfectly exact and accordant in every particular, there would, notwithstanding, be some apparent difficulties arising merely from our ignorance of ancient languages, customs, distant places, &c. ; and, consequently, that if difficulties arising from this source are not more numerous than may fairly be ascribed to our ignorance, they constitute in fact no objection at all. Besides, it must not be forgotten, that in other cases apparent inconsistencies, to a certain extent, exclude the supposition of forgery ; because they, who bear testimony to that which is false, take care so to make their stories correspond, that there shall not be any apparent difference. It may be observed, moreover, that the principle of the objection goes much farther than the objectors themselves wish to carry it : for if, on account of some small irreconcileable differences, we may immediately disbelieve and reject whole books, then no book of history can possibly be believed. Yet Polybius, Livy, Plutarch, and others, in whom much greater contradictions are to be found, preserve their authority and credibility amongst us, as to most points : how much more

reasonable then is it, that no such thing should destroy the credibility of those, who prove by their own writings that they had constantly a high regard to piety and truth.

With respect to the *discrepancies* between the four gospels, which are so often and triumphantly urged in this connection, it should be recollectcd that most of them arise from *omission*, which is always an uncertain ground of objection. Suetonius, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius, have all written of the reign of Tiberius, and each has omitted many things mentioned by the rest. These discrepancies will also of course be more numerous when men write rather memoirs than histories; when they do not undertake to deliver, in the order of time, a regular account of *all* things of importance which the subject of the history did and said; but only such passages as were suggested by their *particular design* at the time of writing.

It has been often affirmed, that the *genealogies* given by Matthew and Luke are irreconcileable; but Dr. Hartley has struck out an hypothesis, which in my estimation removes all reasonable ground of hesitation. He supposes that Matthew mentions the real progenitors of *Joseph*, while Luke gives the series of those who were heirs to *David* by birthright; and that both transcribed principally from genealogical tables, well known to the Jews of those times. Mat-

thew after David takes Solomon, from whom Joseph lineally descended. Luke takes Nathan, upon whom, though he was younger than some others, and even than Solomon, it may be supposed the birthright was conferred, as in the instances of Jacob and Joseph. Matthew proceeds by real descent to Salathiel, at the time of the captivity ; Luke proceeds by the heirs according to birthright, and comes to Salathiel likewise. Hence Hartley supposes, that Salathiel, Solomon's heir, was at that time David's also, by the extinction of all the branches of Nathan's family. Matthew then takes Zorobabel as Joseph's real progenitor, Luke takes him as heir or eldest son to Salathiel. Again, Matthew takes Abiud, the real progenitor ; Luke mentions Rhesa, the eldest son : and thus Matthew proceeds by *lineal descent* to Joseph, Luke by *heirs* to the same Joseph ; for it is to be supposed that, Heli dying without heirs male, Joseph became his heir by birthright, that is, heir to Zorobabel, that is, heir to David. If it be farther supposed, that the Virgin Mary was daughter to Heli, for which there appears to be some evidence, the solution will be more complete, and more agreeable to the Jewish customs. This solution is confirmed by the consideration that Matthew uses the word ἐγένετο, which restrains the genealogy to lineal descent ; whereas Luke uses the article τοῦ, which is very ge-

neral. (k) It is farther confirmed also, by the fact that Luke's descents, reckoning from David to Salathiel, are but about twenty-two years each; which is much too short for descents from father to son, but agrees very well to descents by birthright. (l)

With regard to several passages apparently *contradictory*, the contradiction may be removed by a slight and justifiable change in the translation. Thus, in the often-cited example of the thirteenth chapter of John's gospel, the expression in the second verse, "*And supper being ended,*" is irreconcileable with the 26th verse, "*He it is to whom I shall give a sop,*" "*when I have dipped it,*" according to the received translation. But let the phrase *δείπνου γενομένου* be rendered *supper being COME*, a sense which it will very well bear, and is consistent with the rendering given to the word in several other places, (m) and every appearance of difficulty vanishes. In the version of Doddridge, and in the new version of the Socinians, this translation is given. In Dr. Haweis's translation, the passage is given verbally different, but essentially the same as the one proposed above, i. e. *supper being SERVED*; where again the text is reconciled with verse the 26th.

(k) ΑΓραμμή ἰγίνεται τὸν Ἰσαάκ. Matt. i. 2.

Τοῦ Ἰσαάκ, τοῦ ἈΓραμμού. Luc. iii. 34.

(l) Hartley on Man, part ii. prop. 25.

(m) John xxi. 4. Acts xii. 18. xvi. 35. xxi. 50.

So again, with respect to supposed *absurdities*, it may be most positively affirmed, that they are such as for the most part disappear entirely, whenever we have obtained the knowledge requisite to make us competent judges of any individual case before us. Thus an instance, frequently urged, is taken from the prophet Jeremiah's description of the advance of Cyrus to effect the destruction of Babylon : " He shall come up as a *lion* from the *swelling of Jordan*."(n) Why, exclaims the animadverters triumphantly, why should a lion come from the swelling of a *river*? The answer is by no means difficult. Maundrell informs us, that the river Jordan may be considered as having two banks on one side of it, the lowermost of which is annually overflowed in March. After having descended the outermost bank, the distance is about a furlong over the strand to the immediate bank of the river. This second bank is so covered with bushes and trees, such as tamarisk, willows, oleanders, &c. as to make a complete thicket, in which the various kinds of wild beasts, known in those regions, are wont to harbour themselves. These animals are driven from their covert by the periodical overflowings of the river; and of course burst from their hiding places with an eagerness and fury, which but too appositely represent the passions that impel

(n) Jeremiah xix. 19, l. 84.

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a conqueror in his approach to a city he has devoted to destruction. (o)

Before I quit this part of our subject, you will expect me to notice the *absurd* story of “Jonah in the ‘Whale’s belly.’” It *could* not be a whale that swallowed the prophet, says every objector, for whales are not found in the Mediterranean, and they have not swallows capable of receiving a man. Suppose we admit that to be the case (though whales are *sometimes* found in the Mediterranean, and indeed thrown on the Italian shores), still the difficulty is not insurmountable. It might be replied, that the same God who preserved the prophet alive within the fish, could have enlarged the swallow of the whale so as to absorb him; yet, on the present occasion, there is no necessity for our infringing upon the judicious maxim of Horace—

Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus.

The word *xenos*, in Greek, and Hebrew scholars inform us the analogous word *Tanim*, may signify *any* large fish. The learned authors of the Universal

(o) See *Wells’s Scripture Geography*, vol. ii. p. 152. And for illustrations of several other passages which have been made the subjects of infidel cavil, consult *Harmer’s Observations*, *Burder’s Oriental Customs*, and the *Fragments* at the end of the new edition of *Calmet’s Dictionary*.

History say, “ The word here used (*p*) signifies no more a whale than any other large fish that has fins; and there is one commonly known in the Mediterranean by the name of the *carcharias*, or *lamia*, of the bigness of a whale, but with such a large throat and belly, as to be able to swallow the largest man whole. There was one of this kind caught, within these thirty years, on the coast of Portugal, in whose throat, when stretched out, a man could stand upright.”(*q*) Conformably with this M. Pluche, speaking of the shark, says, “ It has a very long gullet, and in the belly of it are sometimes found the bodies of men half eaten, nay, sometimes whole and entire.”(*r*) These extracts may suffice to show that the story of Jonah and the whale is not so pregnant with absurdity, as many of those who scoff where they ought to admire will endeavour to persuade you.

OBJ. VII. It very often happens, that the Christian Religion does not produce good moral effects upon those who profess to believe it.

Be it so. This is matter of lamentation, but it certainly furnishes no *real* ground of objection against Christianity: nay, if any such objection be urged, it includes within itself a tacit concession in favour of

(*p*) Matt. xii. 40.      (*q*) Univ. Hist. vol. x. p. 554.

(*r*) Nature Displayed, vol. iii. p. 140. Boehart, vol. iii. p. 342.

the Christian system ; since it acknowledges, that, if human conduct were universally consistent with this despised system, a correct and exalted morality would as universally prevail. The legislator of the universe, in promulgating the sublime laws of Christianity, though he furnished men with motives calculated to elevate them to his throne, and to extend their hopes far beyond the grave, did not at the same time transform the intelligent creatures to whom he gave those laws into mere machines. He has given them the power either to conform to Christian precepts, or to infringe them ; and thus has placed in their own hands their own destiny. If, after this, a great many of them reject the good, and choose the evil, the fault is manifestly theirs, and not His, who by so many the most tremendous denunciations warns them against the latter, and by the most alluring invitations solicits them to the former. The objectors *must* allow, that no man is any farther a sincere Christian, than he is pure, and holy, and upright, and free from guile ; and this, if they would only permit their reason to take the lead of their prejudices, would set the great question between them and us at rest for ever. For if, notwithstanding this the acknowledged tendency of the doctrine, we perceive that it has not always answered its end, the only just conclusion to be drawn from the circumstance is,—that the prejudices, the passions, and the constitution of man,

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frequently weaken or destroy the impression which that doctrine naturally tends to produce on the soul. We ought not to be surprised, much less ought we to raise an objection on this basis : for it is easy to conceive, that a free and intelligent being cannot be *necessarily* impelled by motives; since reasons are not causes which have certain and necessary effects, like weights, levers, or springs. Besides, it ought not to be forgotten, that all those who make an external profession of a doctrine are not always really and effectually convinced of its truth : in proportion to the real excellency of Christianity is the probability of hypocrisy ; counterfeit Christians may abound as well as counterfeit guineas, and that for a like reason.

Nor should it be forgotten, that the mode of argumentation on which this objection is founded is not *general*. No one thinks of objecting against philosophy, that all those who profess it are not philosophers. Yet, like as the tendency of Christianity is to make Christians, so in its different kind and manner is it the tendency of philosophy to make philosophers. Let it then be allowed as a *fact*, that all who profess the doctrine of Christ are not saints ; and, as an analogous fact, that all who profess to be philosophers are not such : yet, let none be so weak, or so unwise, as to be laughed out of his religion, or of his philosophy, on this account.

Indeed, here, as in many other respects, religion has greatly the advantage of philosophy. No person rests the truth of any philosophical system upon the difficulty with which it is received, or upon the paucity of those who adopt it ; while many of the declarations of Scripture show clearly,<sup>(s)</sup> that the Christian religion was for a long period to be the religion of the minority ; and that it is only in the *latter times* that great multitudes “of every nation, and king-dom, and tribe, and people,” shall be converted unto God, and become sincere disciples of Christ. The actual state of the world, even where religion is known, therefore, rather proves the truth of Christianity, than militates against it.

I might add much more in reply to this objection, as well as to the kindred one that is founded upon the evils which have been done in the name of Christianity ; but I prefer substituting a quotation from an author of great learning, taste, and judgment, who has never been accused of undue partiality towards the system these letters are intended to support.—“To pretend to say that religion is not a restraining motive because it does not always restrain, is equally absurd as to say that the civil laws are not a restraining motive. It is a false way of reasoning against religion, to collect, in a large

(s) Matt. vii. 14. 21. xx. 16. xxii. 14. xxv. 11. Luke xiii. 24. Isai. xi. 6. xl. 1—11. lxv. 25, &c.

work, a long detail of the *evils* it has produced, if we do not give at the same time an enumeration of the advantages which have flowed from it. Were I to relate all the evils that have arisen in the world from civil laws, from monarchy, and from republican government, I might tell of frightful things. Were it of no advantage for *subjects* to have religion, it would still be of some if *princes* had it, and if they whitened with foam the only rein which can restrain those who fear not human laws. A prince, who *loves* and fears religion, is a lion who stoops to the hand that strokes, or to the voice which appeases him. He, who fears and *hates* religion, is like the savage beast that growls and bites the chain which prevents his flying on the passenger. He, who has no religion at all, is that terrible animal, who perceives his liberty only when he tears in pieces and devours." (t)

OBJ. VIII. The Bible is a tasteless, insipid, inelegant, uninteresting book, composed almost always in a dull heavy style; and therefore cannot come from him who is the Author of language and sentiment.

In replying to this we must relinquish reasoning, and oppose assertion to assertion. To overthrow the objection then, I chearfully refer to the Bible itself,

(t) Montesquieu, *Spirit of Laws*, book xxiv. ch. 2.

and ask where else can be found such wonderful and varied specimens of sublimity, as in the fifth chapter of Judges, the fourth, twenty-sixth, and thirty-seventh chapters of Job, the twenty-ninth, hundred and fourth, hundred and seventh, and hundred and thirty-ninth Psalms, several portions of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and the first chapter of the Apocalypse? Taking them even as they appear under the disadvantage of a translation, I will venture to affirm, that nothing can be found in Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, or Milton, that will bear comparison with most of them in point of splendor, majesty, and grandeur. Where, again, will you find such interesting stories, so artlessly, yet often so pathetically, told, as those of Jacob and Rachel, of Joseph and his brethren, of the death of Jacob, of the widow of Sarephath's and of the Shunamite's sons, of Naomi and Ruth? Where will you find more genuine touches of nature, more delightful pictures of the effects of friendship and sympathy, than those in the eleventh and fourteenth chapters of John's gospel, and the twentieth chapter of the Acts?

Be assured that those, who lay aside the Bible under the notion of its being dull, dry, and unentertaining, deceive themselves most miserably, and thereby deprive themselves of the highest intellectual delight. This most excellent of all books, besides being of the highest authority in its historical por-

tions, and of invaluable utility, as furnishing the only consistent and practicable scheme of morality, contains very much that is superlatively adapted to gratify the finest mental taste. It enters more sagaciously and more deeply into human nature ; it develops character, delineates manners, charms the imagination, and warms the heart more effectually than any book extant : and if once a person would take it into his hand, without the strange unreasonable idea of its flatness, and be only *not unwilling* to be pleased, I doubt not that he would find all his favourite authors dwindle in the comparison, and soon perceive that he was not merely reading the most religious, but the most *entertaining*, book in the world. (v)

The great objects, however, for which the Scriptures were put into our hands, are vastly more important than the mere furnishing us with amusement. God, who is infinitely wise as well as infinitely good, knows our compound nature, and has regard to it, by bestowing upon us a Revelation which is fitted to man, who has a *mind* to be instructed as well as entertained, a *heart* to be amended and renewed, and

(v) For numerous examples and quotations in proof of this position I refer those, who have any doubts, to Blackwall's Sacred Classics, and Melmoth's Sublime and Beautiful in Scripture ; also to Burke on the Sublime, part ii. § 4, 5, 13, and to various parts of Blair's Rhetoric.

a soul to be saved. By this time, I hope, you feel persuaded, upon the solid ground of the most rational conviction, that the Bible contains the pure and unadulterated *word of God*; such as comported with the majesty and mercy of the Supreme Being to bestow; and such as it will be highly salutary to man to receive with humility and gratitude. Study it, then, with daily attention, thankfulness, and reverence. Consider it as an unerring "light to your "feet, and lamp to your path." Here we are often in want: the Bible contains "the bread of life." Here we are strangers: the Bible points to heaven as our home. Here we are in an enemy's country: the Bible directs us to "fight the good fight of "faith," under the guidance of the "Captain of our "salvation." Here we are exposed to temptations; even to all the "fiery darts of Satan:" the Bible furnishes us with "the whole armour of God," and exhorts us to put on "the breast-plate of righteousness, and the shield of faith, to take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit." Here we are often <sup>subject to</sup> in distress, and always <sup>disappointment</sup> in want: the Bible cheers us with the prospect of "a better and an en- "during substance." Here we may be poor, destitute, and despised; but, if we are Christians indeed, the Bible assures us we are heirs of an invaluable and indestructible inheritance, "an inheritance, incor-

"ruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, re,  
"served in heaven for us."

Thus numerous and inestimable are the benefits offered to those who believe the Scriptures, and live conformably to the precepts therein exhibited. That these benefits and blessings may be yours, my dear friend, suffer me to entreat you sedulously to cherish the dispositions essential to a profitable perusal of the sacred pages : those dispositions have been ably delineated by an excellent clergyman now living,(w) in a passage with which I shall close this branch of our correspondence.

"In the first place, study them DEVOUTLY. Remember that they are the word of God ; that they were written under the superintendence of his Spirit; and that their great purpose was to introduce and extend over the whole earth the Gospel and the kingdom of his Son. Remember, also, that they were written to conduct you to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Read them therefore with reverence and holy fear ; and make it your earnest and constant prayer to Him, from whom alone cometh every good and perfect gift, that his grace may open your understanding, enable you clearly to comprehend the import of the Sacred Writings, and deeply impress it upon your heart.

(w) Mr. Gisborne, in his Familiar Survey, &c. p. 291.

“ Secondly, study the Scriptures with HUMILITY; with a sincere desire to receive instruction from them, and to submit your own opinions to the declared will of your Maker and your Saviour. If we may judge, by the manner in which some persons speak concerning the Scriptures, of the temper and spirit with which they read them, we may almost conclude that they read them for the purpose of cavilling, finding fault, and raising difficulties and objections. Be not thus blind and presumptuous. If you take up your Bible with Christian humility, you will not say concerning any doctrine, ‘ This is a ‘ strange and unreasonable doctrine, and I cannot ‘ receive it.’ Your language will be, ‘ This doctrine ‘ is clearly contained in the word of God, and there- ‘ fore must be true.’ You will not say, concerning any rule of practice, ‘ This is a hard and grievous ‘ commandment, and I may be excused from regard- ‘ ing it very strictly.’ Your language will be, ‘ This ‘ commandment is positively enjoined by my Lord ‘ and Judge, and I must obey it, if I would prove ‘ my love to him, or escape condemnation at the last ‘ day.’ ”

“ Finally, read the Scriptures with a full purpose of heart, not merely to learn what they require of you, but faithfully to PRACTISE it, through God’s blessed assistance, every day of your life. ‘ Not ‘ every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall

'enter into the kingdom of heaven : but he that doeth the will of my Father.' 'Not the hearers of the Law are just before God ; but the doers of the Law shall be justified.'(x) If you read the Scriptures carelessly, or merely from custom, or rather from a spirit of curiosity, than from anxiety to profit by them, and to grow in grace ; you do not read them as you ought to read the Word of your Maker. You do not read them like a person solicitous above all things to obtain through Christ the Kingdom of Heaven ; and conscious that it will be bestowed by Christ on those only, who strive according to their power to learn from the Scriptures the way of his commandments, and faithfully to walk in it, by his help, unto death." Believe me,

Dear Friend,

Unalterably Yours.



(x) Matt. vii. 21. Rom. ii. 18.

END OF THE LETTERS ON THE EVIDENCES OF  
CHRISTIANITY.



